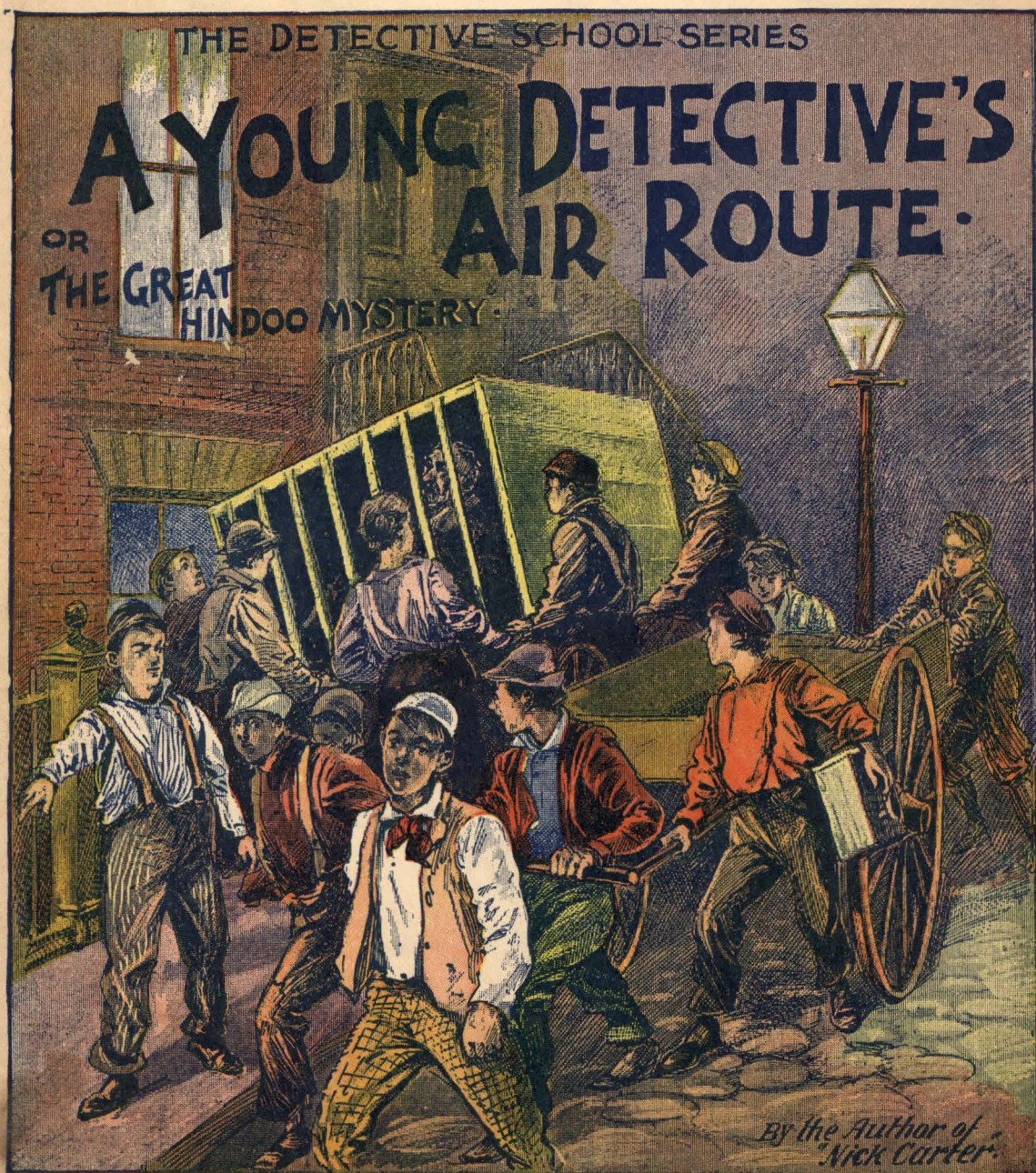


NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued weekly. Subscription price \$2.50 per year. Entered as second class matter at the N. Y. Post Office by STREET & SMITH.

No. 224.

Price 5 Cents.



WITH QUICK DEXTERITY BUFF GOT THE COOP CONTAINING THE HINDOO THROUGH A DOORWAY OUT OF SIGHT.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

*Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1901 by Street & Smith, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress,
Washington, D. C.*

Issued weekly.

Entered as second class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.

Subscription price, \$2.50 per year.

April 13, 1901.

No. 224. STREET & SMITH, Publishers. NEW YORK.

228 William St., N. Y. 5 Cents.

A YOUNG DETECTIVE'S AIR ROUTE; OR,

The Great Hindoo Mystery.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

AT BAY.

"Whoop!"

"We've got him."

"Roll her along!"

"Here we are—stop!"

The excited cries rang out echoing in front of the house, or rather detective school, of America's greatest criminal catcher—Nick Carter.

Down the middle of the street, so strange a procession that pedestrians, truckmen, even the patrolmen on duty stood petrified, gaping, a motley, pushing, yelling, rushing crew pressed forward at fire-brigade speed.

It looked as if the pick and flower of New York's riff-raff newsboy and boot-black humanity were trying to make all the noise possible, while presenting a spectacle that was not only a novelty but a puzzler.

As many as ten ragged urchins were urging forward a large-sized handcart.

Tied to it was a good stout chicken coop, and inside of this was a man, likewise tied, whose shrill cries and wild jerkings added to the babel of the occasion.

Ahead of the procession, a short cudgel

in his grasp, flourished constantly to clear the way, a sort of drum major in vivid action—ran a certain bright and shining jewel of metropolitan gamin life, known familiarly to every habitue of Newspaper Row as Buff Hutchinson.

King of the newsboys, he was a monarch complete in the present wild dash, for his sharp orders of "Turn!" "To the left!" "Faster!" were obeyed as if a trained battery of artillery was under his control behind him.

Straight in front of Nick Carter's home, crowd and vehicle rattled, to halt with a shock, stock-still, at the rapid words:

"Here we are—stop!"

The boy Buff reached the sidewalk in a jump, crossed it in a slide, was up the steps three at a time, and his grimy hand gave the bell-handle a pull that nearly tore it from its sockets.

Open came the door, and out glared the face of Nick Carter's veteran manservant.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"We've got him!"

"Got who? See here, what kind of a lark are you up to, anyway, in a respectable neighborhood—"

"Yes, what is it—oh! it's Buff."

The newsboy king edged his way half past the servant, to get nearer to a person whose magnificent physique and magnetic face loomed up beyond him at that moment.

"Mr. Carter!" palpitated the excited Buff. "You know—you remember? Told me to keep a watchout around Guffey's tenements for a fellow?"

"Yes," nodded Nick—"the Hindoo."

"I've got him."

Nick looked a trifle surprised.

"Quick work, Buff."

"Ten dollars don't float our way every day, Mr. Carter. There he is!"

"Where?"

"Had to get help—he fought like a wildcat. Cornered him in a backyard—coop, ropes—we've run all the way—"

"Buff! Buff! this really won't do!" spoke Nick quickly, with a somewhat disconcerted glance at the commotion without.

"No other way."

"A little too demonstrative. Down the steps with you! back to the area, dump the coop and disperse that mob before the neighborhood is scandalized."

The amateur detective looked a little crestfallen at so sharp a criticism of his methods, but he reached the curb in a jump.

Keen, well-trained, one word sent his helpers into action, across the walk the cart flew.

The coop was instantly released. With quick dexterity Buff got it through a doorway out of sight.

"Scoot!" came his sharp mandate.

Like magic cart and crowd swung away from the house. In thirty seconds every vestige of the recent commotion had faded as if it had never existed.

Nick Carter had been interrupted in a conversation with three of his pupils by that sharp ring at the door bell.

As he hurried down the hall now he stuck his head into the gymnasium.

"Bob Ferret!" he called out.

Nick's pet graduate, the boy who had done some of the slickest work of the group, was in reaching distance in a flash, while his companions, Jack Burton and Aleck White, looked expectant and interested at the detective's animated movements.

"They've got him," spoke Nick.

"Who?" projected Bob.

"The Hindoo. That newsboy fellow, Buff, did it. Incidentally, knowing he had the ins and outs of Guffey's tenements at his finger's tips, but scarcely dreaming that our man would come there, I offered him ten dollars. He's earned it."

"The man is here?"

"I will have him up stairs in a few minutes. Make your play, Bob, and coach the others. I am satisfied this means a definite starting point in what has been nothing heretofore save guesswork and theory."

Nick Carter went down stairs to receive the strange consignment that fate had sent across his path.

Bob Ferret re-entered the gymnasium that was a favorite haunt in Nick Carter's detective school, to startle his companions with the information just imparted to him.

Then as the door opened Bob glided into a sort of a cabinet where disguises were kept, whence he could peer and listen without being observed.

Nick Carter entered the room half-holding, half-pushing before him as singular a looking being as ever invaded the detective's headquarters.

In everything but dress the newcomer was distinctively East Indian, Hindoo characteristics being most powerfully displayed.

Tall, lithe, sinister, quick as a flash in every movement, armed with eyes that shot out glances keen, piercing, terrifying by turns, the newcomer glared about him like a restive animal in a trap.

Instantly Jack Burton took up his position at one door leading from the room. Noiselessly but significantly Aleck White made guard at its other exit.

"Sit down," ordered Nick Carter, and he pushed the stranger to a chair.

The latter having devoured the apartment with looks that took in every possibility of escape, now turned his burning glance upon his captor.

Nick met his eye calmly, firmly, unflinchingly. He read power, alertness, depth in the Hindoo's saffron face, and he knew that in a wordy contest, as in a

battle of nerve, he had no ordinary adversary to deal with.

"You are Djalma, the Hindoo?" he spoke interrogatively.

Quick as lightning the Hindoo flared up. A superb disdain came into his eyes, his lips curved, he drew erect, looking almost kingly in the proud defiant pose of his head.

"By what right do you make yourself my judge?" he demanded.

"The law."

"Bah!"

The Hindoo made an unutterable gesture of contempt and confidence combined.

"You have placed yourself under its suspicion, if not within its pale."

"Prove it!" hissed the man. "Is this Russia that I, a stranger, am made the football of a lot of wild boys? Is this—mis hallah abon!"

The speaker checked himself with some native ejaculation so fierce and expressive that it shook his very frame.

In an instant his manner changed. From contemptuous defiance his dusky features relaxed to breathless alarm, to positive fright.

He moved a trembling finger toward a magnificent portrait on the wall that he had just noticed for the first time, as if tracing the autograph signature beneath it—"Nick Carter."

"That—that," he quavered, "is you?"

"I am called Nick Carter, yes," answered the detective simply.

It seemed as if the discovery of his host's identity was crushing the Hindoo. A ghastly streak of yellowish-white came across his twitching lips.

He looked about him hopelessly, a lost expression dimmed the ferocity of his dark eyes.

Then his hand groped in the loose silk scarf he wore as a belt, came out, and a black globule held between thumb and forefinger shot into his mouth.

Nick was impressed by a movement he could not analyze—mystified, yet warned.

He sprang toward the man and seized his wrist.

"What have you done?" he demanded.

The Hindoo's face hardened grimly—a dull, resigned look haunted it now.

"Do you hear me?" urged Nick, very

sternly, "you know why I have brought you here—to demand an explanation of your peculiar movements. What have you to say?"

"A few words and then I am silent," at last spoke the Hindoo. "At most men, even your great police chief, I would snap my fingers. The trail of the snake in the grass, the flight of the eagle aloft—find them if you can! But to you, king of man hunters, to whom they say jungle and eeyrie are alike open books, I have heard of you, and to you——"

"Well, what?" demanded Nick, impatiently.

"My last word—I am mute!"

"You don't intend to talk, eh?"

Nick Carter measured the Hindoo with a pretty portentous glance. The man sat dumb as a Sphinx, rigid as a statue.

The transfixed eyes of Nick Carter's young assistants read the oracle quickly.

The Hindoo, making the discovery that his captor was the famous detective, squarely met the issue by "throwing up both hands," but refusing to speak one added word.

"We shall see!" remarked Nick, and he walked to a cabinet, unlocked it, took up a graduated glass, mixed something in it from several bottles, placed it on a stand, and striding straight up to the watching but emotionless Hindoo, said:

"My friend two weeks ago you stole your way into the grounds of the retired railway magnate, Edward Spencer, on the Hudson.

"Feigning to be a travelling peddler of oriental curios, you managed to see and reach the grandson, only heir and favorite of the gentleman in question—Rolfe Spencer.

"Upon the back of his right hand you impressed a mark, a symbol of your native language in indelible ink.

"That mark Mr. Spencer has since come across in the papers of his dead son, the boy's father, and presumes it has some mystic import.

"We know it is a menace, for twice since attempts have been made to kidnap the boy.

"The Spencer place is now so guarded by watchmen that there is little fear of your succeeding in this.

"Mr. Spencer, however, was determined to find you. After a week's search accident has placed you in our hands.

"We do not know your colleagues, the men, the natives back of you, but this you must now tell."

Nick took up the liquid he had just prepared. The Hindoo's face quivered the merest trifle.

"It is not a question of your will against mine," continued the detective, "but of your complete helplessness under the spell of science—of a chemical that once administered unloosens lips however tightly sealed."

The Hindoo started. His wall of reserve went down like a paper castle. He arose to his feet.

"Hold!" he spoke, "and hear you me. What am I—a mere atom in the whole. Remove me, a score spring up to fill my place.

"Listen, you—the great, the only searcher of true detective science—I fear you. When I heard that name, Nick Carter, I surrender, I give up.

"But only I. You shall not make me speak, your chemical is vain. The pellet under my tongue is beyond your reach.

"Even now what trifle I have absorbed affects me. I drop out of the case, a case involving that of which you little dream.

"Wise as you are, cunning as you are, it is like fighting regiments to combat the real power back of that symbol on the hand of young Rolfe Spencer."

Every accent the Hindoo employed bore the tinge of truth.

"In eighty seconds do you know what will have occurred?" he went on. "To all intents and purposes I shall be dead. You have caged me. I seal my lips. Try your vaunted powers against the physical faculties paralyzed by the most powerful drug in the world! Part of a machine, I have done that which was apportioned to me. I am content."

The man swallowed the pellet—Nick could tell it by the movements of his lips.

His eyes fixed on vacancy—they glowed—glazed, closed.

Then a lump of lead, a clod, rigid as bone, colorless, inert, the Hindoo slid to the floor and lay to all seeming dead.

The faces of the detective's two young

assistants became pictures of consternation.

They had never seen Nick Carter baffled before.

"Mr. Carter," spoke Jack Burton anxiously, "what has this man done?"

"All he says," replied the detective gravely. "These Hindoos are drug experts. He is no ordinary person—this is no ordinary case. To all intents and purposes, as he truly said, he is dead. It may be days before he revives. He has, indeed, blocked the game by sealing his lips on the Spencer case. My young friends, you will have to seek the clue to the mystery of the warning symbol on young Rolfe Spencer's hand in other quarters."

A form stepped from the disguise cabinet in rather a sensational way, although that was not in its owner's thoughts.

Made up for a shadow so that his own friends would scarcely have known him had they met him on the streets, Bob Ferret approached the detective.

"Mr. Carter," he said simply, "I think I know where to make my start."

CHAPTER II.

A WRONG MOVE.

"Go ahead!"

"Here's the back yard?"

"Of Guffey's tenements, yes," spoke Bob Ferret.

"There's where we caught the Hindoo."

Buff, the newsboy, pointed at a door coming out under a rear stairway.

"Caged him in the corner," he went on. "By the way, owner wants a dollar for the coop."

"Nick Carter will pay it," promised Bob.

"And we busted a wheel on the cart fetching it home—seventy-five cents for that."

"Present your bill. Now, then, where is the room the Hindoo occupied?"

It was just after the sensational collapse of the Hindoo at Nick Carter's house, and Bob Ferret had done the best thing in view toward getting a new start in the Spencer case—because the only thing in view—had come direct to the

spot where the Hindoo had been captured.

What Nick had told was positively all that either the veteran or his young protege knew of this singular affair.

A wealthy magnate fancied all kinds of impending evils, because a mysterious symbol had been secretly impressed upon the hand of his grandson and heir.

When a railroad president he had often engaged Nick to help him with his active detective experience, and had come to him now, imploring him to locate the Hindoo who had visited his home in the guise of a peddler to learn what those strange symbols meant.

They meant something deep, sinister, tragic—from the start Nick was satisfied on that point.

He learned the Hindoo's name, a little about his being a travelling juggler, but that was all.

In this information Bob, Jack and Aleck had pursued various lines of inquiry, but a casual direction given by Nick to the clever-witted newsboy, Buff, had alone resulted in any tangible discovery.

Buff had executed many little missions for the detective in the past, and was mightily proud to earn the ten dollars, and, incidentally, Nick Carter's good word of praise.

He was prouder still when Bob—knowing that the Hindoo had defied inquiry by drugging himself into a state of permanent catalepsy, and determined to get a clue to the Spencer case on exterior merits—had sought him out.

"Take me straight to the place where the Hindoo lived," Bob had ordered, and they had arrived at the scene of the day's capture.

"He didn't live here," explained Buff, as he pointed at a locked door opening on a gloomy hallway. "He just came there once in a while—slunk in like a snake, flitted away like a shadow. This is his first appearance for days and days."

"Is it?" murmured Bob. "Now, then, Buff, that will do. Don't mention to anybody I'm here—forget all about the Hindoo."

Buff looked crestfallen.

"Sure I can't do anything more to help you?" he queried.

"Very sure."

"Wish I could," declared Buff ardently. "I tell you, it's the life for me, this detecting—all bustle and excitement. And I can follow a man like a shadow! I've done it for Mr. Carter—hung under cabs, gone over roofs, once lay in a distillery vat all night. Say—let me help you!"

"Well, of all the coaxing, ardent aspirants!" commented Bob. "No, Buff, I'm on a lone trail just now, but some other time you shall have a show. Of course, if you found out anything more about this Hindoo——"

"Yes, yes," pressed Buff eagerly.

"Follow it up, and report to Mr. Carter."

The newsboy king vanished with a smile as proud as if he had been given an official commission from New York detective headquarters.

Bob tried the door before him, inserted a wire, turned the lock catch, entered, reslid the tumblers and lit his dark lantern.

It was the barest room he had ever seen. It held a chair, a table, a wardrobe. In the latter Bob came across a bundle incased in a worn, frayed strip of velvet, hanging from a hook.

It appeared to hold some tools or trinkets. About to open it, Bob shot his lantern slide abruptly.

Some one tried the door. Then there was a fumbling under it, and plainly visible in the contrast with the grimy floor there stole through the threshold crack a letter.

"Luck!" pronounced Bob Ferret oracularly, and held his breath.

A letter—a letter for the lessee of this room, and who was that but Djalma, the Hindoo!

Into his pocket Bob thrust the parcel found in the wardrobe. Eagerly he picked up the missive.

The envelope bore no superscription. A great black splotch of wax disfigured its back.

Bob tore it open unceremoniously—focussed the bull's eye upon it.

"P'st!"

He was badly disappointed. A glance was enough. Into his pocket, crumpled, went the letter, after it bolted the lantern,

and Bob was out of the room and at the front of the house in a jiffy.

"Ought to have slid out right after the fellow who brought the letter," decided Bob. "But can't think of everything. He's gone, now. Here is what Nick Carter may well call a bad break. Now what?"

Bob fumbled the crumpled missive thoughtfully. The street lamps had just been lit. He got in range of one and inspected the letter again.

"Hindoo jargon," he soliloquized—"I know that from what I've run across in this Spencer case. Tells something, though. What? The thing is to find out."

Bob started forward briskly. The hunt for the Hindoo during the past week had led him directly across the track of many persons of that nationality in New York city.

Bob, Jack and Aleck had run down all kinds of fakirs, jugglers, students, business men and sailors in the hunt for Djalma.

Among them Bob suddenly remembered a Hindoo described as "an agent" and his place was less than a mile away.

He occupied a house so closely shut up that Bob had never been able to see him. Each time he had called, a cunning-faced servant had avowed he was away, negotiating for the sale of some menagerie animals.

"I'll stop there, anyway," decided Bob. "I'll hire him to translate the letter. They say he's an interpreter, furnisher of talent for conjuring troupes, and all that, so this will be in his line."

Bob arrived in front of a gloomy house in a gloomy side street, and operated its ancient knocker.

The same servant he had met before admitted him, asking his business.

Bob told that he had a letter in Hindoo which he wanted translated, the servant bowed, led the way up some stairs, and ushered him into a room hung with many oriental draperies.

The apartment was filled with curios, and the air was dense with incense burning in a filagree censer. As Bob was taking in his surroundings, a curtain parted and a great athletic fellow attired

in a costume half-barbaric viewed him questioningly, almost suspiciously.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I have a letter I wish translated—only a moment's work. You do such tasks?"

"Yes. Let me see it."

If a serpent had bit the agent, he could not have started more violently than he did as Bob handed him, open, the missive he had just found in the Hindoo's room.

Instantly, however, the startled face became a wily one. He threw out one arm in a stretchy way, and muttered:

"Those twinges of pain! They always affect me before a rain—the bite of a cobra some years ago. Ah, yes! Hindoo! But the Northern dialect. My friend, this will take me some time to decipher. Will you accompany me to my study?"

Bob tried to guess how much was real and how much was sham in the man's evasive manner.

He was shrewd enough to discern that the letter had startled the man, but Bob knew no such thing as fear.

He followed the agent through several rooms. They came to one less elaborately furnished than the others.

It had a table on which several opium pipes rested—its sides were sealed, in one corner was a sink and a hydrant, and near it a high cupboard.

In this were hung a variety of garments that looked to sharp-eyed Bob amazingly like disguises or stage dresses.

Altogether, there was an air about the apartment suggestive of the secret conclave room, the laboratory, the lair of men who wanted to be isolated when occasion required.

The agent shut and locked the open cupboard door, muttering something about the carelessness of his servant, seated himself at one end of the table, and beckoned Bob to a chair opposite.

A cup-like contrivance hung by a string from the ceiling, and in this was a candle, affording the only light in the room.

The agent held the letter toward it, but his eyes were not fixed on the letter.

Bob caught them fastened on his face as if piercing him through and through.

"You wish this letter translated, do you?" interrogated the agent, and there

was a certain sinister undertone of expression in his voice.

"Yes," answered Bob promptly.

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Bob in surprise. "Because I want to know what it means."

"Ah, yes!" purred the agent, stroking his chin slowly thoughtfully. "The letter was written to you, I presume?"

"No, and say—what has that got to do with it?" appended Bob in a practical, business-like way.

"Just this: You may have no right to know the contents of this letter."

"But I have—every right in the world!"

"I think not!"

There was a lurking menace in the man's tones as he spoke these words.

He arose with them, to his feet. Bob fancied he purposely struck a little silver bell at his side with his sleeve, but he could not tell for certain.

At any rate, his suspicions were instantly set on guard.

"Give me back my letter!" he demanded, extending one hand. "When I hire people I do not care to go into details that is none of their concern."

"No!" spoke the agent, definitely.

"You won't?"

"Hardly."

"Why? Is this the kind of business you do!"

"It is, when I am personally concerned."

"Personally concerned?" repeated Bob, getting irritated.

"Exactly. I will not give you back that letter until you tell me how it came in your possession."

"I'll soon see about that! What business is it of yours——"

"All in the world."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," answered the agent, fixing a baleful, dangerous look on Bob, "for I wrote that letter myself less than an hour ago!"

CHAPTER III.

HOT AND HEAVY.

"In a trap!" muttered Bob Ferret under his breath.

He needed neither time nor a magnify-

ing glass to plainly read the situation so alarmingly presented to his view—he had placed his head in the lion's mouth!

Trying to run the Hindoo down, he had run right into the man who was probably an active coadjutor, possibly the head of the whole plot, certainly the friend and confidante of Djalma.

"You understand?" hissed the agent menacingly between his set teeth.

"I reckon I do?" answered Bob, backing out of grasp, sliding one hand to his weapon pocket, and trying to appear as cool as he could."

"And now, who are you?"

Bob did not reply.

"How came you by that letter?"

Bob fancied explanations entirely out of the question.

"What interest have you in our affairs?"

It was fight, now, to get out of the muddle faster than he had got into it, Bob saw this.

"Three times and out!" grated the agent. "No answer? Very well!"

That "very well!" was ominous. Bob expected an onslaught and got ready to fight.

The agent, however, never made an offensive move. He simply glared at Bob.

Whirret!

An indescribable whistling sound cut the air.

Thug!

Bob threw up both arms with a spasmodic suddenness.

From behind a slim but strong cord with a heavy pendant had shot about his head like a swift circling butterfly.

Twenty times around his throat it wound, each fold growing tighter and tighter, and then the loaded end struck the side of the neck in a deadening, dazing way.

Choking, Bob whirled about in helpless agony and fell to the floor.

In an instant a lithe form was upon him. One knee on his breast to hold him down, the servant who had admitted him unwound the suffocating cord, but not until he had deftly, swiftly bound hands and feet securely.

"It is silence, master?" he asked, looking up inquiringly at the agent.

"It is silence."

"I say! You murderous scoundrels," voiced Bob, struggling.

Flop!

A plaster came across his mouth, close fitting as an air-tight jar cover.

With his foot the agent spurned Bob, and his assistant dragged him over near the sink and dropped him, Bob's head being saved from a sound knock by landing on an old mantle lying wadded up on the floor.

"Now, come!"

The agent directed a glance at the helpless, prostrate Bob that left little promise of near release or satisfaction.

As he and his servant closed the door of the next room, Bob heard a final word:

"This means danger of the worst sort! Word must be sent out immediately."

"Struck the very nest of the plot!" floated convincingly through Bob's mind, "but—laid out at the very first step!"

The agent and his servant must have gone to the remote part of the house where Bob had been admitted, for the latter heard several doors slam.

Then he started a trifle. A heavy chain rattled near, and a gruff, growling sound echoed vaguely.

"Animals? Some of the menagerie he's negotiating for," mused Bob. "I suppose all kinds of horrors exist under this roof. Wonder what they'll do with me?"

Bob felt neither comfortable nor confident. He blamed himself, too, for his present unfortunate environment.

"I acted a trifle too precipitate," he reflected, self-chidingly. "But who in the world would fancy a casual inquiry would land a fellow slap up against the very person who wrote that letter to the Hindoo! Well, now, what's that?"

Bob, from studying gloomily the flickering, swinging candle, fixed his gaze abruptly upon the cupboard he had noticed, and the open door of which the agent had closed and locked when he had first entered the room.

That door was shaking—beyond it was a great rustling. Bob grew bigger-eyed as he continued to peer.

"Hope none of the grewsome pets these people fancy about them, like the cobra

that bit the agent, is in there," ruminated Bob. "Something is. Well!"

The cupboard quivered under some heavy pressure. Then a good, sound, solid kick made the door creak and strain.

It had a stout lock, however, and was made of some close-grained Indian wood hard as hickory.

There was a brief cessation in the rustling and jamming about inside the receptacle that was beginning to assume in Bob's puzzled mind something of the character of a spirit cabinet.

Then this idea rushed with still greater force through Bob's amazed thoughts, for, muffled but distinctly audible, there issued through the strained crack where the top of the door had been sprung by pressure, two words—a name.

"Bob Ferrit."

"Gracious!" voicelessly commented Bob.

"It's me."

Bob wondered who. Too vigorous and boyishly human was the quick call to emanate from spirits.

"You know—Buff."

"Preposterous!" gurgled in Bob's throat.

Rattle—shake—quiver—once more the cupboard began to echo with animated sounds.

"Buff?" cogitated the wondering Bob. "It isn't possible, and yet it is. Buff! I can't credit it. Buff! and he's coming!"

Coming he was—not out, but over, and in a way threatening a menace that made Bob curdle.

It seemed as if the occupant of the cupboard, finding pressure, leverage, kicks and blows ineffectual in his circumscribed quarters, had taken to throwing his whole weight against the door as an experiment.

The result was immediate. The door did not give, but the entire cupboard did.

It lifted, tilted. Bob shivered as he saw it topple.

Then over with a tremendous crash it landed, grazing Bob's feet, missing his head by less than half an inch.

Darkness intervened. The top of the descending cupboard had struck the string-pendant, censer-cased candle, and

had swept the primitive chandelier before it as if it was chaff.

The cupboard had landed with destructive force. Bob could no longer see plainly, but he had heard boards crack and splinter—in fact, several pieces of wood had struck the wall beyond him.

He listened eagerly for some demonstration from Buff.

Bob's heart sank as a low, murmuring groan issued from the wreck of the cupboard.

The newsboy had sustained a fall or a blow that had stunned him—Bob could reason out no other solution to the intense silence that now supervened.

Had the sound of the crash startled the other occupants of the house—how soon would they arrive to discover and render helpless a new intruder who, had he retained his senses and strength, would have made short work of Bob's captivity.

"How he ever got in here is a mystery," reflected the worried Bob. "The candle!"

Bob could turn his head, that was about all the freedom the stout bonds allowed him.

He turned it now with an animated jerk and a quick expansion of eyes startled and terrified.

The candle had not gone out.

It had rolled under the bottom of the sink box.

Bob thrilled as he realized what had taken place.

His companion insensible, himself gagged to utter silence and bound to helplessness, neither could cry out or strike out for deliverance from a direful, impending catastrophe.

The candle had ignited some oil-soaked rags under the sink.

Bob could smell them.

It had caught the wood-work, also, for this now began to crackle.

All wood—floor, sides, ceiling—Bob Ferret could vividly realize that within the space of five minutes that room would be a roaring mass of flames.

CHAPTER IV.

"FINDING OUT."

A sharp tongue of flame shot through a crack in the side of the sink box and crisped Bob's hair.

It illumined the room momentarily as well, and Bob directed a swift glance at the wrecked cupboard.

"Helpless!"

Bob's last hope sank with the discovery before his eyes.

The cupboard had split open. Half held under it, head and shoulders alone free, where the side had burst out, lay Buff.

The newsboy king had a cruel mark over one temple.

His sunny, tangled hair was matted where it rested across a jagged splinter of wood.

There was not much smoke in the room—Bob noticed this with renewed alarm.

The crash of the cupboard had brought no one to investigate—unless the smoke carried a warning promptly, the conditions promised a holocaust.

The fiercest kind of a fire was pent in the cased up sink box.

When it did burst forth, its fury would be uncontrollable.

All Bob could do was to lie still and quiver. He could not reach Buff, he could not even hope to arouse him from his fatal lethargy by calling out to him.

Bob's cheek nearest to the fire, and not six inches from the shrivelling outside wood of the sink, began to burn and blister with the fervent heat.

Snap—hiss—flare—at last the imprisoned monster had burst its bonds. A sizzling dart of forked flames shot across Bob's face.

Pop—swish—splash—what was this new contending series of sounds, quite as startling and almost simultaneous?

"Melted!"

Bob's voiceless comments came in monosyllabic chunks.

Intense thankfulness and relief let his nerves down from a tension that had been fairly distracting.

The worst was over—the best had happened.

In a word, the fervent heat had melted the lead water pipe.

To a conflagration succeeded a deluge—to the sharp sputter of licked up splinters ensued the dull, sullen hiss of drenched out embers.

A steamy vapor began to fill the room,

but the flare lowered, flickered, reddened, quivered, died out completely.

Bob lay still, letting time brace up nerves scarcely ever before so severely tried.

Then his senses gave a swift response to the sound of a low utterance, the dislodgment of various pieces of the wrecked cupboard.

"Ugh!"

Bob, tracing movements by sounds solely, guessed that a shooting spray of water had driven Buff back to consciousness and to his feet.

"Who am I, anyway? Feel as if I'd never reorganize myself again!" he heard Buff mutter.

Snap—flash—up flared a lucifer.

"Hello!" voiced the newsboy, giving Bob a good, hard stare.

He was down on his knees beside the latter instantly. Bob felt his bonds drop asunder under the influence of a few groping knife-cuts. "Off she comes!" declared Buff, giving the mouth plaster a pull at one edge.

But "off she did not come!" Buff had to make a deft insertion with his knife and leave Bob to work the rest of the gag loose at his leisure.

"Sticks like tar," answered Buff. "Now, then, what is it?"

"Buff," were Bob's first words, and he tried to make them stern, but failed, "Who told you to come here?"

"You."

"Eh?"

"Didn't you?"

"No."

"Short but wrong. You said if I could find out anything further about that Hindoo, to do so."

"Yes."

"And report to Mr. Carter?"

"Well?"

"I was on my way."

"To Mr. Carter?"

"No, to finding out something first. What was the use of going to Mr. Carter till I had, and how was I going to find anything out if I didn't start to do it? A fellow drops a letter under the Hindoo's door at Guffey's tenements. I saw him do it. I followed him. Why not? That seemed in the line of orders. He came here. I sneaked in, then I backed in, fol-

lowed up by the man who lives here, and hid in the cupboard."

"You should have left the letter affair for me to follow up, Buff."

"Say! you'd be in a pretty fix if I had, now wouldn't you?"

Buff's logic was irresistible. Bob rose to his feet and shook some of the stiffness out of his joints.

He lit his dark lantern, flashed its rays over Buff to ascertain that he was not seriously bruised, and approached the one door of entrance and exit which the room afforded.

"Have you found out anything?" inquired Buff in a whisper.

"What do you mean?" rejoined Bob. "About the Hindoo?"

"Of course. That's what you're after, isn't it?"

"Surely. I have learned next to nothing, except that the men here seem to know him."

"Well, when I came here, the way I got in was because some one was going out," explained Buff.

"Is that so?"

"The fellow who lassoed you was the one who brought that letter to the Hindoo. He had come into the house, and the one who lives here——"

"The agent?"

"Call him such—the agent—was saying good-by to a man. I was sneaking close to the door. They passed me, going down a step or two. In through the doorway I slipped. I lingered for a minute. Says the man who was leaving——"

"Was he a Hindoo?"

"No, a white man. I couldn't see his face, but he was rather stout, and the agent called him Major."

"Go ahead, Buff."

"Says the man, Major, two things."

"What were they?"

"First, 'We must act at once. Spoil the phiz!'"

"Eh?" propounded Bob, in mystification. "'Spoil the phiz?'"

"Uh-huh!"

"You heard him say that?"

"Don't I tell you so?"

"What did he mean?"

"I don't know, and there's a worse half of the Chinese puzzle to come yet."

"Indeed?"

"You'll say so when you hear it."

"Proceed."

"Says the man next, 'There's only one route that leaves no trail, and we will take it at once and end this affair—the air route.'"

"He said that?"

"Just those words."

Bob's thoughts scurried fast, but he could make neither head nor tail out of the two singular statements.

That, in the light of facts as yet concealed from him they were vitally significant and important, he was doubly certain.

"Good for you, Buff," he commended. "If you haven't struck the keynotes to the mysteries of this Hindoo case I've missed my guess."

"Spoil the phiz?"

"That means something."

"Take the air route?"

"And that everything."

"What, do you think?"

"I'll tell you when we get out of this den."

"That's what you're after?"

"Quick as quick can be. The agent must be investigated, nailed, before the alarm of my coming with that letter drives him to hide his trail. Come on."

"Say!" demurred Buff, looking sensibly important, "what do you say to my staying here?"

"Why, what for?" said Bob, in surprise.

"What for—to find out something more of course. You don't know, much, do you? You get out, you work the outside end of affairs and let me snook around the inside. I'll bet all I'm worth I'll run down some ideas for you before morning!"

"I have no doubt but what you would, Buff," admitted Bob indulgently; "there's no lack of pluck in you, but the trail lies beyond here now. What you tell me about the man, Major, convinces me that some scheme is about to be put in action away from this place. It is, furthermore, dangerous to stay here, for as soon as the agent finds I have escaped he will start the hottest kind of a search. The evening has been a lucky hit so far, the way things have come out—I don't

want to spoil prospects by any imprudent risks."

Buff rubbed his head dubiously. He muttered something about "supposing a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush," but "not knowing much about real detective science, of course," and silently followed Bob.

The mask lantern showing the way, the two boys passed through one room, half crossed another, and paused summarily.

"Voices!" whispered Buff, and grabbed up a stick with a brass cap and projecting hook on it standing in the corner nearest him.

"Coming this way, too!" muttered Bob.

Like a miniature searchlight the bull's eye went shooting about the apartment.

"We've got to go back, guess," began Bob.

"No, we haven't!"

"Any other way?"

"How's that?"

Buff grasped Bob's hand and directed the focussed glare across something Bob in a hasty, superficial glance had quite passed over.

What had once done service as a plant stand rested against one wall of the room.

Everything about it indicated that it was in daily use as a means of ascent and descent.

About two feet above its top a broad board seemed to swing in on hinges.

"Where do you suppose it leads to?" murmured Bob.

"Don't know, but it's easy to find out," declared Buff, making a dive toward it.

"They're right on us," breathed Bob, following.

He shot the lantern slide instantly. The knob of the door was turning.

"I can't make it out—board pushes in, and it's a drop beyond," spoke Buff at the top of the steps.

"Drop, then—no other way," commanded Bob, sharply.

"Drop it is!"

"Me after you!"

Pell-mell both boys slid past the swaying board, eight feet, ten feet, and landed.

"Say!" voiced Buff in a gasp.

Bob clutched his arm, and both gained their feet pulsating with an ominous, brooding sense of peril.

They could not see a foot before their faces, but they could hear.

Distractingly present in the awesome silence of the place, heavy breathing was audible—the slow, certain velvety movement of some lithe but ponderous creature cut the darkness, approaching them, they felt it, they knew it.

"Bob!" whispered Buff, and his voice was a trifle unsteady, "flare the lantern."

Click—there was a low, purring whine.

Flash—a frightful roar filled the place with thunder echoes.

"Buff!" gasped Bob, retreating and pulling his companion back with him, "it's a tiger!"

CHAPTER V.

A GANTLET OF PERIL.

Facing the most formidable danger that had yet confronted them in the peril-guarded house of the Hindoo agent, Bob and Buff forgot that which might hover in the room above they had had so summarily and blindly left.

A dozen enemies might be at that swinging board space overhead—they dared not look up to see.

Focussed in the bright rays of the mask lantern their new opponent fascinated them, held their glance—a magnificent specimen of the royal Bengal breed.

During recent probings among things Hindooish, Bob had learned of quite a large recent New York consignment of these ferocious brutes.

It was only natural that the agent in his usual province of business should have secured one or more of these dangerous man-eaters.

The boys had unwittingly dropped down into the animal den of the agent's quarters through the space where food was thrown to its occupants.

"Flare him!" whispered Buff, and his shoulders hunched into the pose of a resolute boy, cornered, but fight and mettle to the core.

"What do you mean?" asked Bob.

"Keep flashing the light into his eyes. They say it dazzles them."

"It don't dazzle this one!"

Not a bit of it! The tiger was secured

by a long, bright-linked chain to a central post. In this the chain was riveted, and a glance showed Bob that its slack admitted of the brute reaching to the farthest corners of the apartment.

The tiger stood bristling, glaring ferociously, for a moment.

Then its elastic neck elongated. Growling ominously, it half-crouched on its forefeet as if poising for a spring. It did not heed the blinding light in the least.

"Leave it to me," spoke Buff, hastily. "Get back, I say! Leave it to me, I'm armed."

"Armed!"

Buff was a young whirlwind of strength and positiveness when in ardent action.

He pressed Bob back perforce, and he grasped the hooked stick he had carried from the room above as if he meant to stanchly utilize it for every vestige of merit it contained.

"Keep the light on the tiger—that's all," he directed, sharply.

Buff had pushed Bob back into the far corner of the room, as steadily the tiger kept advancing upon them.

Suddenly it made a spring. There was a terrific snort, a shrill jangle of the chain, a whistling descent of the weapon in Buff's hand, and the animal fell back, a long line of red streaking its face where the hook had scraped.

"Now then—don't move—only the lantern. Come on, puss!"

Bob could not withhold a cry of alarm, but he was too late to intercept Buff.

Around the room, keeping to its closest edge, ran the nimble-footed news-boy king.

After him, straining furiously at its chain, progressed the tiger, gliding, leaping, and Bob, though his hand trembled with suspense, moved the lantern as directed.

"Two laps—three, keep it up!"

The daring Buff bounded by the engrossed Bob as high-spirited as if he was indulging in an ordinary foot race, and then Bob awakened to his scheme.

Each lap Buff was narrowing his course—each circling flight the deluded tiger was winding itself up!

Round and round and faster and faster flew boy and tiger. Whack! every time

he would get in a blow Buff let drive the hooked cudgel, evidently an appurtenance of menagerie training.

"Wound up!"

With the breathless words Buff ran up to Bob, as with a jerk and a growl the baffled, bewildered tiger came to a halt at the end of its chain, slam! against the centre post.

It stood there glaring, snarling, straining out toward the two boys, seemingly too eager to keep them within its lurid glance to venture a backward movement toward regaining its lost territory of action.

Buff had snatched the lantern from Bob's hand, and was inspecting the walls of the place.

"Look there!" he directed, indicating a ventilating window. "We can reach that."

"Why not the board space?" suggested Bob.

"And get back into what you wanted to get away from?" demanded Buff. "I don't believe those fellows know we are in here—must have passed through the room. Look here—oh, don't be afraid of the tiger. It's a dead issue."

"Is it?"

"Up we go!"

Clever Buff utilized the strong stick for a new purpose.

He reached up and fastened its hook end into the sill of the ventilating window.

Nimble as a steeple climber, he lifted himself along it, perched into the broad embrasure, held the lantern to illuminate the course for Bob, and sang out softly:

"Come up!"

"Buff, you're a genius," declared the admiring Bob.

"Am I?"

"And I had a revolver all the time!"

"Might as well try a bean-blower on that tough-hided animal, besides bringing the fellows we've escaped from down on us."

"Think we've escaped, do you?" inquired Bob.

"Here's a slanting roof."

The boys took a last look back at the tiger. Grinding its great jaws together, it glared and growled in baffled, impotent rage.

Then they viewed their new environment.

Rising directly up from the window where they were was a sharp-angled roof—it came down to the side of the building they were in, below walls front and back.

No windows were in reach. To get out of the place they must either venture back or progress ahead.

"We'll see what the prospect is beyond the tip of the roof," spoke Bob. "Come on."

"Go slow—it's terribly shaky," announced Buff.

"Is it?—rather. There goes one foot through!"

"I say!"

"Well?"

"It's paper."

"Never!"

"It is—tarred building paper, and rotten as punk. Take care. We're falling. Well!"

A somewhat startling thing had happened.

As Buff had declared, the roof was constructed of building paper. This, laid on light stringers, was lath-cleated here and there.

Now a broad section perhaps six feet square had torn bodily loose, bent, creased, crumbled, and the climbers slid slowly downward.

Something stopped them, eight feet accomplished—an aerial platform.

Bob landed squarely on it, Buff nearly went over its edge, but Bob caught him and dragged him up.

A dim light shone below, and the two refugees gazed curiously down.

The debris from the roof rained past them, and then by the aid of a lantern on a hook way over at one side, they were enabled a good view of their surroundings.

"What kind of a joint is this?" ejaculated Buff, staring.

It was a building about forty feet square and fully as high.

Below the floor was sawdusted. At one end were turning bars, punching bags, an outfit of contortionists' spheres.

About twenty feet over from them and lower down were two trapezes, attached

to the other and seemingly stouter section of the roof.

In fact, all kinds of acrobatic equipment littered the floor, and Bob was not slow in surmising what the great barn of a place comprised.

"It's the practicing room of the agent's outfit," he explained—"a sort of gymnasium."

"That's just it!" assented the enlightened Buff. "I say, though, there's a lantern down there, and somebody may come in at any moment."

"Yes, we will lose no time in getting out of this."

"But how?"

The roof course was blocked to them, judging from past experience—they might not be so lucky as to fall on a platform the next time.

Even this platform, secured by light bars to the stringers overhead, had seen its last days, for it shook whenever they moved.

"We've got to go down to get away, that's certain," calculated Bob.

"It's a twelve-yards drop, if a foot," declared Buff. "Say, I'll fix it."

"Will you?"

"Sure!"

"How?"

"See me do it! I'll throw you up a rope inside of ten seconds. Here goes!"

Bob had heard before of Buff's accomplishments as an all-around amateur acrobat, but he was scarcely prepared for the boldness and dispatch of his companion's next movement.

Buff gave a little run along the diving board, and Bob saw that he was aimed for the nearest trapeze.

The slant was a fair one, and Buff had calculated closely.

His hands struck the trapeze bar squarely, but just then something not anticipated took place.

The bar, rotten, unused for months perhaps, snapped directly in two.

With a slight interjection of annoyance, Buff went whirling ahead, about as sure of his final landing place as a person tumbling down an elevator shaft.

Bob uttered a cry of vivid alarm, however. Stationary, he was enabled to see with clearer vision a possible landing place.

Buff was headed squarely for a double ladder, such as is employed by professional sword-walkers.

Every ring was a scimeter, and upon their keen, glittering edges, it seemed certain that the daring, reckless Buff must land.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF A LABYRINTH.

Bob was not the boy to ever be frightened into helplessness, no matter what menaced.

He gave a yell that rang like a clarion note.

"Look out!"

He saw the speeding Buff duck his head, he fancied a cry of dismay answered his own. At all events, Buff's supple form described a quick, a remarkable manœuvre.

Buff did credit at that critical moment to his proud reputation as a gymnast.

All the palpitating Bob saw was a human form doubling into a wad, like an India-rubber ball.

The next instant, by one of those extraordinary evolutions gained only by powerful practiced control of the muscles, the expert Buff threw a double somersault.

It broke his fall, and it enabled him to evade the gleaming battery of scimeters, waiting thirstily to drink his life blood.

"Superb!"

Bob voiced the enthusiastic encomium more like a critic viewing a first night performance from a private box, than a boy air-Crusoed aloft not knowing how he was going to get back to terra firma, and likely at any moment to see any number of aroused enemies coming in at the door of the amphitheatre.

"Landed!"

Buff piped the call cheerily, but he must have had no easy landing, for he looked a little jarred, and stood feeling of his limbs cautiously before he started into action again.

Bob saw him grope in among a lot of miscellaneous plunder, whence his hand emerged bearing a rope.

"Want to try the other trapeze?" he grinned up audaciously to Bob.

"Not on this occasion!"

"Come off the perch, then!"

With the dexterity of a cowboy, Buff hurled a coil aloft.

"That was an ordeal!" commented Bob, affixing the rope and sliding down it to the ground.

"Yes, and maybe a lot more to go through," observed Buff.

"There's doors enough to get out at."

They advanced toward one that looked rearward from the house fronting the street, as most likely, to prove the safest avenue of exit.

Just nearing it, Buff gave Bob a nudge that carried him completely off his feet.

With him he fell, plunged, tumbled directly behind a massed up pile of tent canvas.

"S-st!" he warned.

"You're not forcible or anything!" whispered Bob.

"Had to be. Lay very low."

"What's up?"

Bob had his answer as he peered cautiously. In at the door came the servant who had admitted him to the agent's house in front, and who had later nearly strangled him to death.

The fellow took a look all around. Apparently, from his hurried, peering manner, he was there for the purpose of looking for somebody.

He glanced aloft, saw the broken roof, the still quivering rope, and planted himself squarely, head thrown back, staring up, and evidently trying to make out if some one had just gone up or down the rope.

Buff crept softly away from Bob.

Near the door was a wire form dummy, employed doubtless to exhibit costumes.

Soft as a cat's tread was Buff's footfall as he seized his.

His intended victim turned just as Buff got directly up behind him, but he was too late.

The wire device came over his head like a net. He was undersized, and it pressed him flat.

"Holler, and I'll fill you with sawdust!" declared Buff, laying all over the cage-like contrivance to keep his prisoner helpless.

"Or lead!" supplemented Bob, decisively, springing forward with leveled weapon.

Buff ran from the cage and began dragging two heavy tent poles forward.

These he crossed so as to press down the cage effectually.

"Now then," spoke Bob, "which is the easiest way out of here?"

The dusky prisoner looked murderously sullen.

"Better speak!" advised Buff, kicking a pound or two of the fine sawdust through the wire strands into the fellow's face and eyes.

The agent's servant strangled, shook with rage, and pointed at the door through which he had just entered the place.

"Come on," directed Bob.

"What's this, first?"

Buff made a dive with one hand. He reached through the wires of the cage.

A fearful cry of alarm rang from its inmate's lips as Buff triumphantly pocketed a folded paper.

"Mine—give it back!" raved the fellow.

"Out, before he's raised an alarm!" directed Buff.

The agent's servant, yelling, scrambling, was wildly endeavoring to free himself.

Bob bolted for the door, Buff by his side.

"Ah! he told the truth for once," observed the former.

With gratification and relief Bob saw just ahead of them a paved court.

Over its centre hung an electric lamp, and this showed several streets diverging from this little waste piece of land beyond their intersection.

"We're out of it!" piped Buff.

"Halt!"

"It's the agent!"

Bob came to a stop. From some shadowy angle of the place the agent stepped forth.

He had a revolver in his hand. This he leveled so menacingly, that Bob did not dare to draw his own weapon.

"Back where you came from!" he hissed out.

Not a person was in view. Bob faltered.

"See here, mister——" began Buff.

"Silence!" grated the man. "Listen, both of you! Do as I say—go back

whence you came, or I fire—twice! I am a dead shot."

"I won't!" declared Buff, flatly.

"Be warned!"

Bob began to slowly retreat toward the street.

"One!"

"Dodge—he can't hit both," whispered Buff.

"Two!"

"Thr——"

A yell of pain, howled forth in sudden agony, completed the last numeral.

On the sill of some upper window came the tapping of some one emptying a pipe of tobacco, instantly followed by the fall of its burning refuse.

This landed, red-hot, on the hand that held the revolver.

With a clang, the weapon dropped to the pavement, its owner driven off guard by the excruciating pain caused by the torturing, fiery mass.

"Run!" directed Bob.

"Hand in hand!"

It was a dart, a slide out of the court, into the public street, off into a side lane, and into a doorway at a safe distance Bob and Buff glided to catch their breath.

"Safe!" panted Nick Carter's youngest detective. "We've run the gantlet at last."

"Whew!" panted Buff. "I say! we've done pretty well."

"Yes," assented Bob, "it's a hot one for a starter."

"Starter?"

"Certainly. It's only eight o'clock. Why, Buff, I call this just fairly beginning a good night's work!"

CHAPTER VII.

ON HAND!

"You make my head spin!" said Buff Hutchinson, the newsboy.

"Make your feet spin when the signal comes—look to that!" responded Bob Ferret, detective.

Three hours had elapsed since, after running the most terrifying gantlet of his life, Nick Carter's apt pupil and his chance assistant, Buff, had emerged safely from the den of the Hindoo agent in New York City.

They were now many miles away from there. Bob had barely taken a breathing

spell after escaping the leveled revolver under the electric lamp.

The minute he inspected the paper that Buff had snatched from the pocket of the agent's servant they had caged in the ampitheatre, it seemed to furnish the clear, impelling motive to further action.

He simply asked one question: Did Buff wish to help him out a little further on the case in grasp?

Did he!—Buff's eloquent face and eager eyes flashed an unmistakable reply.

Then straight for the West Shore Railroad depot Bob put, and now, one hour before midnight, after a lonely walk from a little railroad station, the two lone trailers found themselves in the vicinity of a magnificent country home.

It was just here, lurking in some shrubbery, about twenty feet from a high brick wall surrounding the grounds like a prison, that Buff avowed that Bob's quick dash from city to suburb, and his rapid and vivid explanations, auguries and directions made his head resemble a top.

"Say it again," he spoke. "No, let me say it. When you blow that silver whistle twice, sharp, I'm to find you—come to you?"

"Inside the place here, if I need you, yes," responded Bob.

"On the tap. And if you don't whistle, I'm to lay low right here. No matter who comes, what happens, I'm to stay quiet?"

"Just that."

"All right."

"I want to explain something to you, Buff for you deserve to know it," pronounced Bob. "We are trying to run down the plot that began with the Hindoo you and your crowd captured in the chicken-coop to-day."

"I guessed that."

"He's a dead issue for the present, but the agent, his servant, the man, Major, you told me about, are probably the other active end of the scheme."

"That's easy, too."

"Well, what they are after, evidently, is a boy in yonder house."

"Sho!" ejaculated the imaginative Buff, disappointedly—"just a boy! Not burglary, or counterfeiters, or a murder —"

"No, a plain, simple mystery."

"Oh! it's a mystery? Well, that's better."

"On the hand of the boy living in that house, Rolfe Spencer, the Hindoo has put an indellible sign—some kind of a Hindoo symbol."

"Marked for life!"

"Twice they had tried to kidnap him."

"What for?"

"That's the mystery."

"Oh, I see!" muttered Buff, perplexedly.

"The paper you snatched from the pocket of the agent's servant this evening is a rough plan of this place."

"Is it, now?"

"You heard the man, Major, say to the agent two very startling things this evening."

"Spoil the phiz?"

"Yes."

"Take the air route?"

"Exactly. What do those strange expressions mean?"

"A break for the boy, I guess."

"That's how I read it—prompt progress, anyway. Thinking it all over, I concluded that this is to be the center of action, if any place," explained Bob.

"Why didn't you have the agent arrested?"

"What for?"

"That's so, what for? What he did to us was our own concern, in sneaking in on him. But why don't you say something to the people in the house here?"

"And alarm them unnecessarily, and have them raise all kinds of commotion and scare away the people we're after? No, Buff, the only way to find out the real merits of this affair is to catch the Hindoo's assistants red-handed. I believe they are going to come here to-night. That's why I'm here. Lay low. For your life! Look there. They're here already!"

Bob pulled his companion down among the bushes. The night was moonless, but his eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness.

Very plainly he could make out a form advancing—its outlines, its movements.

It was that of a man clad in the same tight-fitting under garb the agent back in the city had worn.

"A Hindoo," murmured Bob—"a new actor in the play."

Bob was deeply impressed with the sudden appearance. The new-comer moved like a phantom—not the rustling of a leaf nor the crackling of a twig attended his swift progress.

"Lie still—move only on signal," whispered Bob to his gaping comrade, and started to follow the man who was fast flashing out of sight.

The spot was dense with overgrown bushes, saplings, high grass and tree stumps.

The new-comer passed by and among these without a trip, stumble or even seeming contact, but Bob had to proceed more slowly.

He managed, however, to keep the man in sight, and as the latter halted he dropped flat.

A peculiar call like that of a night bird rang out after the lapse of perhaps sixty seconds.

This was followed by a spell of silence lasting over five minutes.

The Hindoo had taken up an easy, negligent waiting position against a tree stump, and, arms folded over his breast, seemed content to wait patiently for what was to come.

"Machines, the last one of them!" commented Bob. "This fellow acts just like the one captured to-day—runs his spurt, and waits for the next move like an automaton."

Heavy footsteps, disturbing grass and weeds heedlessly, suddenly broke the spell of silence.

Bob saw a rather stocky form loom up, and coming forward peer into the Hindoo's impassive face squarely, with the words:

"From Djalma?"

"You know it," voiced the Hindoo.

"There was a token?"

The new-comer flashed some kind of a ring.

"It is enough," nodded the Hindoo.

"I am to call you Major?"

"Correct, and now to business!"

"The man Buff saw at the agent's house," murmured Bob.

All business, brisk, loud-toned as if he was running an auction sale instead of taking part in a sinister and secret

mission, the man called Major put out his hand.

Into it the Hindoo delivered a packet.

"It is the money," he explained.

"Correct. Now then, brisk's the word, my friend! Let's start the programme."

"The house yonder is guarded."

"I understood so."

"I shall go, as I said. I will reach the picture."

"It's your concern."

"I shall get all ready."

"And send me the silken cord?"

"As agreed."

"It will take me some time to get my traps in shape," remarked Major.

"Out of sight, out of reach, we have till morning, if we wish."

"Good! and when I am ready?"

"I deliver."

"The goods—and I am to redeliver to your friends."

"You will not fail?"

"With double what you gave me just now waiting me back in New York city? Hardly! Wait. I want to send a word to the agent. You will see him?"

"When I am through here."

"Very well."

The man called Major lit a cigarette. The Hindoo uttered an ejaculation of alarm, and blew out the match he flared before he was fairly through with it.

"That is not our way!" he said, seriously.

"Oh! they're all asleep in the house yonder," nonchalantly observed Major.

By the aid of the bright end of the cigarette he began writing on the back of a card he had taken from his pocket.

Then he tore it in half, cast it aside, took out another card, and after scrawling a few lines, handed it to the waiting Hindoo.

"There you are," he spoke. "Just give that to the agent—a word about when I'll see him, and where, on my return."

"It is well."

"Start in."

"You will proceed cautiously?"

"Oh! I'll get there, never fear."

Major threw away his cigarette. The Hindoo, uncoiling a knitted cord from his waist, started to skirt the wall of the Spencer grounds.

Bob was not at all clear as to what these two men were up to. The great contrast between the twain struck him forcibly—one was all caution, the other careless, eager only, it seemed, to hurry through with a programme in which he was to handle "the goods" for a money consideration.

Major turned on his heel and proceeded into a little patch of bushes.

Bob fancied that he saw there a heap of stuff that looked like tumbled tent canvas and other like belongings.

He did not wait to investigate, however. He felt that the Hindoo was the vital centre of the night's operations, and he put after him.

First, however, Bob crawled forward a few yards, and picked up the card Major had torn in two.

He tried to scan the printed surface, but it was too dark. Then, cautiously lining the wall, he followed it.

The Hindoo, quite a little in advance, turned a sharp angle of the wall.

As Bob reached this, he paused.

Some kind of a garden building came up to the nail-studded top of the wall.

Along its centre ran an ornamental iron cap.

The Hindoo arranged the coiled cord he had unwound from his waist, and made a superb throw aloft.

The looped end caught across one of the centre points of the roof ornament.

Nimble as a monkey, he went up the cord, reached the roof apex, and disappeared beyond it.

"Great action!" commented Bob. "What am I to do—follow?" Bob reflected a minute or two. Then he drew from his pocket a pair of adjustable rubber soles, attached them to his shoes, buttoned his coat tight, and gliding up to the end of the cord dangling down the wall felt of it.

About to seize it and begin an ascent, Bob realized that he had retained in his palm the two pieces of card Major had thrown away.

"I'm sort of curious to know what line that fellow is in," soliloquized Bob. "Maybe it would be a valuable pointer."

He faced in to a sheltered corner of the wall, and ventured to momentarily flash

his lighted mask lantern upon the fragments of pasteboard.

"Well, here's a puzzler," muttered Bob emphatically, as he read the chronicle they bore:

"William Major, Rainmaker."

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK WORK.

"They're a queer lot!" murmured Bob, pocketing the torn card for future reference, as he noted an address on it.

He voted the last accession to the ranks of the Hindoo conspiracy to be the strangest of the crowd so far in sight.

"A rainmaker! I wouldn't wonder at snake charmers, contortionists, sword swallows, lion tamers—that's the natural trend of these fellows—but a rainmaker—what's his act going to be, anyhow?"

An important one, of that Bob was assured. Bob was hungry for developments, and his zest for getting deeper into the dense, hovering mystery of the night urged him promptly forward.

He went up the rope as the Hindoo had done, perhaps not quite so nimbly, still, Bob was a practiced climber, and he reached the apex of the roof without bungling.

The other side led to a few feet from the ground by a gentle, gradual descent.

Bob took a shrewd glance all about before he ventured down.

He made out the object of his shadow, just gliding past the corner of the great mansion, a hundred feet away, among some bushes.

Bob slid to the ground, crossed to the same point and halted just past the spot where the Hindoo had disappeared.

"Where has he gone to?" questioned Bob. "Ah, I see!"

Bob discerned the man with his back to him, crouching close to the house.

He was watching somebody or something out of Bob's range of vision.

A row of bushes ran straight out from the house for over fifty feet at this point, forming an almost unbroken hedge.

Bob lined these. He had now a point of vantage whence he could see the entire front and side of the house.

Way around at the front was a little summer arbor.

Inside, on a table, stood a lantern. Its rays showed two forms reclining in hammocks.

Just beyond Bob, seated in a rustic arm chair, his feet tilted upon a garden urn, sat a man, and this man the Hindoo was watching.

"I know who they are," reflected Bob—"the officers guarding the house. They all seem asleep. No, this one is only drowsy, but—that fixes him!"

Bob started slightly. The Hindoo had dropped flat. Bellying along like a snake, he got just behind the nodding watchman.

Reaching under the chair he waved a silken scarf. It must have been previously impregnated with some subtle anaesthetic, for almost instantly the already drooping head of the watchman sank upon his breast in apparent profound stupor.

The Hindoo arose erect, gave a keen glance at the distant arbor, and then returned to the house.

He now seemed to think that he was out of range of any observers, for he moved more boldly and quickly.

There was only one light in the house down stairs—in a wing, evidently the library.

At its window the Hindoo halted. He peered in, tried the sash, seemed to find it locked or a burglar alarm attached to the inside, for he did not try to spring the holding catch, probably an easy process for a fellow of his fertile resources.

"He's a good one," voted the keenly interested Bob.

With one sweep of a jeweled ring on his finger the Hindoo cut a deep circle in the glass pane. There was a gentle tapping, and Bob saw him remove the piece.

Bob wondered what he was after. Then, from looks and gestures, he guessed that the Hindoo was interested in some way in an oil portrait facing him from the opposite wall.

"It's a picture of a boy," murmured Bob. "I can make that out. Why! it's probably one of the boys they're after—young Rolfe Spencer."

The Hindoo groped in his silken belt. Then he seemed to be molding something with two fingers of his right hand in the palm of the other.

This he rolled into a ball and set it between his teeth. Applying his mouth to the hole in the pane, he ejected an aspiration that Bob, even at the distance he was, could plainly catch.

"I say!"

Bob started now. The man had shot something from his mouth that struck the picture, direct.

There was the faintest snap, the dimmest flare in the world.

The face of the portrait seemed to writhe—little streaks of phosphorescent luminosity ran across it, and it shriveled up like a piece of scorched paper.

"Spoil the phiz!"—I understand now," gulped the engrossed and startled Bob. "That Hindoo is prepared for anything. These fellows have probably learned that the portrait is the only one of Rolfe Spencer, and want to destroy it so no photographs will be scattered over the country to block them when they get the boy away. Shrewd workers—I think!"

Bob was sure that he had guessed correctly the solution of the first section of the man Major's expressive programme—"Spoil the phiz!"

The Hindoo, at all events, seemed through with the initial stage of his night's work.

He drew away from the window, glared over toward the two recumbent forms in the hammocks as if he would like to drug them, too, and then running an imaginary line from the post of inspection across the house, and evidently considering that they were so placed as to be all right for his plans, he lined back the building till he came to a corner where a water spout ran up.

Without an instant's hesitation, as if he thoroughly knew his ground, and understood his own powers completely, the nimble gymnast seized this and went up it clear to the roof like a cat.

"I can't do that!" decided Bob, in dismay.

It did, indeed, look a difficult task, but even as Bob studied the pipe, the angle where it ran, down came uncoiling a light ladder.

Why dropped, why left in place, Bob could not comprehend just then, but he

guessed that it, like the cord hanging from the garden house roof, had been put in place to facilitate escape if forced in a hurry, or to leave an easy course for "William Major, Rainmaker," to pursue, if it was intended that he should later come immediately upon the scene.

Bob glanced up the dangling ladder and regarded it admiringly.

Light as paper, it was most exquisitely constructed. Fine, soft silken strands wound round tiny links of the strongest steel.

Weighing not more than sixty ounces, the ladder was probably capable of sustaining a full ton pressure.

Bob looked up and hesitated.

"It's trust to luck," he decided finally. "That fellow's no idler. He isn't sitting on the roof whistling to the birds or looking at the stars. No, he's at his work, whatever it next is, and probably too busy to notice me, if I get aloft when he isn't looking."

Bob went up the silken ladder. Eyes level with the roof, he took a cautious squint.

"Why, where is he?"

There was a flat roof before Bob, broken only by chimneys and a skylight in the centre, and he could scan it pretty thoroughly.

Nowhere across the surface of the roof, however, was the Hindoo visible. A veritable steeple-jack, had he come up here simply for amusement, and gone down on the other side?

"Hardly; he's too much business for that, and he's working hard and quick," ruminated Bob. "The skylight's open. I declare! if the daring fellow hasn't got into the house!"

So convinced was Bob that the Hindoo had disdained burglar-alarm-guarded windows and double-bolted portals, passing them over to gain an entrance never suspected by the inmates of the house, that he ventured to crawl out upon the roof.

He approached the open skylight timidly. Conjecture was made certain as he gained its—side.

A light hinge-jointed rod held it open about two feet, and tied to the chimney near by and running down over the edge of the skylight frame was another of those

ubiquitous cords with which the Hindoo seemed illimitably provided.

Bob peered down. The shaft ran clear to the lower floor. Windows of various rooms fronted into it for ventilation and light.

From one about fifteen feet down the dim light of a turned down lamp penetrated the shaft.

There, halted by a dexterous knee-loop of the cord and a solid purchase against the back wall of the shaft, was the Hindoo.

He resembled some hovering bird of prey—a veritable vampire, as his serpentine fingers roved over a window frame, and Bob saw him softly lift the sash.

CHAPTER IX.

QUEER PROCEEDINGS.

Bob called a halt on himself, and took stock on environment and prospects.

"What is the Hindoo up to, any way?" he cogitated.

Was this "the air route that left no trace?" Then where did the rainmaker come in?

"I could nab the outfit in a jiffy," declared Bob.

"There's Buff, a host in a tussle, the watchmen below, the people in the house. Flop! with the skylight, clip! with the rope, and one man's caged, but what good would that do? We catch the men, but we know no more about the motive underlying all their schemes than we did before. No, I'm not doing police work—cutting out clues with an ax—I'm trying the finest strain of detective science, to gain a creditable showing, as Nick Carter calls it. I'd better let things ripen a bit longer."

Bob crouched by the skylight, and peered down like a cat watching for a mouse to come out.

Then he craned his neck interestedly. A dim shadow-play began on the white wall of the light shaft just opposite the window opening into it.

He could trace a sinuous form moving about in a furtive, gliding way.

It seemed to be flaunting that inevitable silken scarf again, hovering over some object.

There was the sound of drawers cau-

tiously opened. Then a head came out into the shaft, that of the Hindoo.

"He's coming up again," decided Bob.

What should he do? where should he hide? Bob selected a chimney on the far side of the house, ran to it, and crouched behind it.

The Hindoo came up quickly. What he had accomplished below Bob could only guess—presumably he had drugged the occupant of the room he had entered.

Bob watched him curiously and narrowly. The fellow was in vivid action again.

He seemed never to pause in a carefully marked out course; he worked like a piece of well-regulated machinery, every movement timed and prompted by some intricate but shrewdly devised system.

"What's he at now?" muttered the peering Bob.

The man was adjusting to two lengths of cord a three-foot square piece of stout cloth, which he had brought out folded in small compass from some hidden pocket.

His task completed, he had a hammock-like contrivance that would readily rest around one person's shoulders, while sustaining another at the back.

This he threw to the roof. Then he drew a long flute-like tube from his belt.

He applied this to his lips. Next he produced a reel of the finest string.

Yard after yard he unwound at his feet, till he reached a nubbin at its end.

This he inserted in the pipe, moved about till he faced the point where he had left the man Major, and gave a quick, sharp puff.

Bob could not see what he had done, for the fineness of the string, but he guessed that the Hindoo had laid a minute cable from the roof of the Spencer mansion to the point in the brush outside where the rainmaker lingered.

The Hindoo held one end of the string, it seemed, like a doctor with his finger on a sympathetic nerve.

His sensitive form vibrated as there appeared to come a jerk. He waited again. Then he began to pull in.

Slowly, steadily there came into view a stouter cord, then a thin rope, and then two glittering wires of largest piano size.

When these reached the Hindoo's

hands he separated them, wound one round and round the nearest chimney several times, knotted it, gave a signal pull on the other wire, and both instantly stretched out taut.

"That man, Major, at the other end," cogitated Bob. "He's tied it to some tree. What for? Is he coming up here aloft that way? Is that the mysterious 'air route?'"

A silent telegraphic code of pulls and jerks appeared to guide the Hindoo now.

His whole attitude was that of a person paying strict attention to signals from a distance.

He finally began pulling in the loose wire in his hand. Bob fixed his eyes down the strange slanting cable.

Along it came a dark, bulky object. It crossed above the garden wall, above the garden, straight up to the Hindoo.

Tent canvas or rubber covering of some kind it certainly was, but so tied that Bob could only make out a bundled up mass.

Bob now saw that it had been hooked to a loose ring along the fixed wire.

The loose wire the Hindoo pulled in on was attached to one side of this ring, and a wire operated from beyond was fastened to its other side, so that the man in the brush and the man on the roof could pull to and fro.

Back went the moving wire. In ten minutes a second load came over, in twenty a third load. Bob began to stare.

"This beats me!" he ejaculated, perplexedly.

It looked as if the Hindoo and his distant accomplice were massing on the roof of the Spencer residence the paraphernalia of some circus troupe.

A great basket-shaped affair, swathed in cheese-cloth, was landed next; then a couple of fibre ware tubs, strapped together.

Bob rubbed his eyes. His brief detective career had involved some pretty strong situations, but nothing, he decided, approximating the present one in novelty and mystification.

"I can't guess what they're up to—I can't think out the slightest excuse for all this business," he confessed, blankly. "Ah! there's the end of the air shipments, I reckon."

A big can came swinging to the Hindoo's hand, and, unhooking this, he dropped the wire and stood back against the chimney like a statue, arms folded, in a pose of dumb patience.

Perhaps half an hour went by. The Hindoo pricked up his ears suddenly, advanced to the edge of the roof where the silk ladder ran down, and glanced over.

Into view a minute later came the great blustering face of the rainmaker.

He puffed like a porpoise, and he looked out of sorts, apparel disordered and shaken up generally.

"Better provide wings, next time!" he muttered gruffly.

"Not so loud, I pray you!" remonstrated the Hindoo.

"Well, I'm a skimmer by profession, but I'm too heavy to scale all kinds of impossible roofs. Got the plunder safe?"

"It is all here," replied the Hindoo.

"Very good. You've done your share."

"All but the——"

"Exactly, the goods?"

"Your burden is ready, when needed."

"And no trouble?" demanded Major.

"No more than a lump of clay."

"That's the way I like it! Oh, by the way—I dropped a can of chemicals from the ladder. Will you go down after it?"

"Willingly."

Over the edge of the roof the Hindoo dropped. The rainmaker turned his back to Bob as he stood and watched the descent and ascent of his confrere.

Bob rustled. He was trying to do some pretty heavy and urgent thinking, but he gave it up.

As to what these fellows were about, he could not gain the remotest inkling.

What a "skimmer" was, why a rainmaker was brought into service, were puzzlers that fairly racked his brain.

One thing, however, Bob Ferret did know—every occurrence of the night was a link in a chain leading straight to young Rolfe Spencer.

The final end to which these two conspirators were reaching, was the kidnapping of the grandson and heir of the wealthy magnate.

"Am I due below—oughtn't I to know what the room that the Hindoo

visited contains?" inquired Bob. "If so, now's my chance."

Bob acted on an impulse. He glided from the chimney and reached the open skylight.

He was over its edge just in time. As his head went down the shaft, the Hindoo's came up over the roof.

Bob swung and slid to the window that he had seen the Hindoo enter.

He got over its sill without any difficulty and dropped the cord.

"A new chapter in this strangest of all strange cases!" murmured Bob Ferret, as he gazed curiously and keenly about the room.

CHAPTER X.

A DARING RESOLVE.

A turned-down lamp burned on a stand in one corner of the apartment.

Its rays were dim, and even the bed in the centre of the room was in vague shadow, yet the instant Bob glanced thither he guessed who the person sleeping there might be.

"The boy—Rolfe Spencer," he soliloquized.

The slumberer had his face partly buried in a pillow, but Bob knew he was the original of the portrait destroyed by the Hindoo in the library below.

At a glance he saw that he was in a sodden sleep, and detected its cause in a dead, heavy taint in the oppressive air.

"Drugged by the Hindoo," decided Bob. "What's this? A suit of clothes laid out to carry away with him? That shows they're going to take him, and that—ah!"

Bob came to a dead halt, studious and attentive.

One hand, the right hand of the sleeper, was extended from the coverlet.

Across its white, shapely back was a deep bronze mark—a combination of two strange symbols.

"That's the mark Mr. Spencer told Nick Carter about," declared Bob.

He had seen the symbol that had been the cause of all the present complications twice before.

A copy of it had been brought by the ex-railway president to Nick's headquarters, and all the detective's pupils were familiar with it.

The second time Bob had seen it was barely three hours before.

On the train from the city with Buff, he had taken occasion to open the package he had found hanging in the wardrobe in the room formerly occupied by Djalma, the Hindoo.

It contained two articles—a long strip of velvet covered with gems worked into various mystic symbols, and an ivory device resembling a watch charm.

Chancing to press this on a piece of paper, Bob had ascertained that the end was a curved stamp with an invisible supply of ink or stain.

In fact, the contrivance was the brand with which the present symbol on the hand of the sleeping boy had been imprinted.

Bob stood regarding the sleeper with mingled emotions.

He rather liked the expression of what of his face he saw, and his helplessness appealed powerfully to every instinct of both humane and professional sympathy.

"They're going to kidnap him, that is certain," calculated Bob. "Now then, what shall I do? I can carry him into some other room, and they would find an empty nest when they came. I could nab them red-handed. What then? The menace is not removed. Djalma boasted that many are in this plot, that others will spring up as some drop out. The same efforts to get the boy will be continued. No, to call a halt now, even with the agent, his servant, the Hindoo on the roof, the rainmaker, all cornered, would scarcely satisfy me. Djalma has shown how one of these fanatics can keep his lips sealed. As to Major, he would undoubtedly fall back on the declaration that he was simply hired to take the boy away, that he knows nothing of the real motives underlying the crime."

Bob figured up the case in all its bearings.

The essential point was to probe the motive that led to his extraordinary determination to abduct Rolfe Spencer.

"I can't make it out, and there's only one way to make it out!" he declared.

Another spell of thinking—Bob's earnest face working actively the meantime.

"And that way—I'll do it!"

When Bob Ferret made up his mind to

do a thing, it meant action, prompt and positive.

He had made up his mind to something now—so daring, so rash, that even Nick Carter, with all his superb disregard of perilous consequences, so that he scored a point, might have held him back had he been on hand to advise.

Bob's lips compressed grimly. He stopped thinking and went to acting. The first thing he did was to softly open a door at the side of the apartment.

Peering in he made out that the next room was not occupied.

"Sort of reading den for this young fellow," soliloquized Bob. "There's a couch in it, too. Just the thing. Here we go!"

He leaned over the bed, lifted Rolfe Spencer in his strong arms, carried him into the next room, placed him on the couch there, returned to the sleeping apartment, locked the door he had just opened, and threw the key under the bed.

A bureau drawer was open which the Hindoo had apparently ransacked to secure apparel for Rolfe Spencer.

Bob found a night garment ready to hand. In sixty seconds he was out of his own clothes, in sixty more into the night robe.

Ransacking his discarding garments to stow in an inside pocket of his shirt a few loose articles of personal possession, Bob had barely time to get to the bed, into it and under the clothes, when he heard a vague voice coming down the shaft.

"Get the goods," spoke the accents of the rainmaker.

"The Hindoo is coming down. Pshaw!" muttered Bob. "There's my revolver, my money. I only had time to grab these."

"These" were the jeweled strip of velvet and the ivory stamp Bob had found in Djalma's city apartment.

He stowed away both hurriedly, but not until, pressing the latter down across his right hand, he counterfeited there in plain, livid semblance the symbols that had made Rolfe Spencer a marked boy.

"I'm in for it now—make or break, sink or swim, I've taken the step, and—

I'll go through with it!" declared Bob, grimly.

Bob Ferret had decided to take the place of Rolfe Spencer.

What the Hindoo conspirators intended to do with that boy he had no means of knowing, but he did not believe from their actions that it extended to bodily injury.

Had this been true they would have simply put him out of the way by some of their numerous secret arts that could never be traced.

Revenge, hatred certainly did not lurk beneath the intentions of the plotters.

Bob reasoned that Djalma had seen and singled out Rolfe Spencer, had attached the brand, and by that mark his accomplices would be able to identify the boy at all times.

The light was turned low, and Bob held his face in deep shadow, but made sure to extend that tell-tale right hand.

In the urgency of his removal the Hindoo would not detect the substitution, reasoned Bob, and the rainmaker was going to convey him away alone.

He would probably be delivered to parties who had never personally met the real Rolfe Spencer.

At all events, all the uncertainties and possibilities of a daring imposture Bob was about to face.

More than once he was half-minded to make a dive for his clothes and secure the contents of their pockets.

Every time he moved to place this plan in execution, however, it seemed to him that those voices aloft sounded nearer and nearer to the light shaft.

A quick flare came down the shaft, but died out as quickly.

A hissing sound followed—the dragging of heavy objects across the roof. Then again Bob heard the rainmaker's voice:

"Bring him up."

Bob, posed for his part, managed to keep a half-closed eye on the window of the room.

Down the cord came the Hindoo, stepped into the apartment, and for a moment or two was busy adjusting the rope harness of the cloth piece Bob had watched him make on the roof.

Bob saw what this was intended for at

once—a medium for carrying him aloft like a papoose.

The Hindoo took in the marked hand with an advancing glance. Then Bob was lifted.

A blanket was wrapped about him, and he was deftly swung across the cloth-carrying contrivance.

He held his breath as the Hindoo got up on the window sill, he counted the seconds till the roof was reached, for so frail was his balance, so terrifying the numerous jerks and jolts of the climber as he struggled up the cord, that a crash to the bottom of the light shaft seemed imminent at every moment.

Panting with his extraordinary exertion, as he got over the edge of the light shaft, the Hindoo rolled Bob up in the blanket and laid him flat on the roof.

"All is ready?" Bob heard him ask.

A flapping, fluttering sound struck Bob's hearing, and then the echo as of metal catches snapped, as of the jangling and straining of some mechanism.

"Yes," responded the rainmaker.

Bob dared not move. The Hindoo stood directly beside him.

Cased like a mummy, Bob could not see out a particle—could barely hear audibly, except by straining his senses to their utmost.

"Got his clothes?"

"I forgot."

There was a few moment's respite, but only that brief, for the Hindoo was down the shaft and up it in a twinkling.

"Toss them in," continued Major's voice.

Into what? Bob would have given a dollar for one single peep.

"Now the boy."

Bob was lifted.

He rested in something that swayed. The sensation was an ominous one—but Bob was not frightened, only curious.

"Got your knife ready?" demanded the rainmaker, and Bob felt him wedge into the same receptacle in which he now lay.

"Yes," came the Hindoo's voice. "One word—you will not fail?"

"To deliver the boy?"

"As you promised."

"That's what I'm running all this risk and discomfort for, isn't it?"

"My brothers are in waiting."

"I will gladden their eyes soon. Now then, she's straining. All ready?"

"Yes."

"Cut loose!"

Bob could stand the curiosity, the suspense, no longer.

The mystery, the uncertainty of the moment drove him fairly frantic.

He boldly moved aside the blanket.

At that instant he was carried upward with a sudden jerk.

Then a strange buoyant sensation he had never experienced before pervaded every nerve.

He poked out his head.

Of its own volition it popped back, under the influence of the start, the shock of Bob Ferret's life.

"Why!" gasped the electrified Bob, "we're in a balloon!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRITICAL MOMENT.

Bob Ferret was "up in a balloon!"

The unexpected discovery, the ominous unreality of a kind of progress new to him so completely unnerved the young detective that he lay still enough now, in all reason!

Bob felt as if every energy was paralyzed. The terrifically unique methods of the Hindoo conspirators had nothing approximate in the whole realm of detective lore that he had ever heard of or read about.

Then Bob suddenly remembered that sterling axiom of Nick Carter's—"Never get rattled till you're hurt!"—and tried to trace his present peculiar position to natural causes.

He slowly drew his head out of the blanket again. He lay in the bottom of the basket contrivance he had seen landed on the roof he had just left.

Beside him was the rainmaker, turning a device that looked like the handle of a rudder.

At one side four light paddles were whirling in the wind, and overhead were the two tubs, on top of which sat some kind of a little tin lamp, well shaded, and evidently converting the chemical contents of the tubs into gas which supplied the narrow but high and bulging

bag overhead, and to which all this equipment was attached by ropes.

"Rainmaker!" breathed Bob, in an enlightened way. "I can see now why he was called in."

This was the boasted "air route"—and it indeed left no trail!

Unwilling to risk an abduction through the ordinary exits of a house well guarded, the Hindoos had gone to this past grand-master in ballooning science—probably some former circus aeronaut.

Bob had once witnessed the performance of one of these men with their rain-making balloons down at Coney Island—had seen the dexterity with which the exploding globes shot the clouds, the ease with which ordinary balloon ascensions were accomplished.

For a brief rise and a short run on a windless night, the small air bags used by this craft were just of that handy kind which could be manipulated at any place with a very brief preparation.

At all events here was the situation, and less alarmingly Bob now accepted it as quite a novel and pleasing episode, as he saw Major standing at the mechanism as unconcerned as an engineer running a slow freight engine.

Bob got quieted down and braced up very promptly. There was really no cause for alarm, he saw that.

"I started to go where this fellow thinks he is taking Rolfe Spencer," soliloquized Bob, "so what matter the route that brings me there?"

Bob lay perfectly still. He wondered what the real Rolfe Spencer would think when he awoke, what would come to poor, waiting Buff. He knew enough of the pertinacious character of the newsboy to believe he would stick at his post through thick and thin.

"When morning comes he'll go back to the city, though—that's sure," calculated Bob. "He'll tell Mr. Carter. Nick will send Jack or Aleck to hunt me up, there will be explanations at the Spencer mansion, the boys will figure out what's happened, and——"

Bob paused there, come to a dead stop of the most pronounced kind.

On the track of a deep mystery, he was plunging personally into its densest

phase, and the future was completely obscured.

For two mortal hours Bob lay in the position in which he had been placed.

Finally Major moved about the limited space of the basket more generally.

He took to looking over its edge; by touching some mechanism he slackened the speed of the balloon.

Bob could guess they were descending. There were a good many jerks and jolts, quite a bang that rattled his teeth, a bounding slam or two, a sharp hiss, and as Major leaped out the bag above the basket began to sway to and fro, and settle down slowly as the gas ran out, covering Bob completely.

If he was minded to escape Bob felt that here was his opportunity, but he let the chance slip by.

He feigned his former inertness as the bag was dragged aside.

Through his partly closed eyelids he made out that four men had seized him quite gently.

They lifted him out of the basket and were bearing him toward the open door of what looked like a deserted mill on the edge of a little stream.

Bob was carried down some stone steps, into a room with a lantern swinging from a bare rafter, and placed on the skin of some animal spread upon the floor.

His four carriers squatted bow-legged in a circle about him.

Not a word was spoken. Bob's nerves were more tried by the grim, unwavering cynosure of those eight keen, gleaming eyes than by any ordeal he had yet passed through.

He decided to precipitate a climax. He had come here to find out something, and he was in a boyish hurry to do so.

Bob opened his eyes, sat up, rubbed them, stared at his four grim watchers in affected astonishment and alarm, and started to his feet.

At this the quartette arose also. One of them had brought in the bundle of Rolfe Spencer's clothing.

He tendered it to Bob with some guttural ejaculations, and Bob took it.

The minute he was dressed two of the Hindoos took each an arm, and, the others leading the way Bob was ushered into another room.

He gave a start of real interest as he crossed its threshold.

Another Hindoo sat on a stool. At his feet played a small leopard.

It snarled and bristled at the entrance of a stranger, but a word from the man caused it to slink behind a roll of matting across which rested a wicker screen.

Just beyond the man Bob observed a hole. It looked like a grave, and his senses crept a trifle as he saw that it was deep and freshly dug.

The man arose from the stool. Then all five of them eagerly scanned the symbols impressed on the back of Bob's right hand.

The man they had intruded upon was, to Bob's way of thinking, a kind of a leader of the crowd.

"I am the only one here who speaks your tongue," he said. "My friend, a glorious career awaits you!"

"Does it?" muttered Bob, dubiously.

"You are the son of Mark Spencer, formerly of India."

"It's Robert Spencer he means, but let it go."

"This Mark Spencer married when in India the Princess Etilka, the last of a great house—a line of prophets, magicians, wise men. You are her son. We have sought a trace of your father everywhere. We have found you at last. You are a mystic!"

"What's that, I wonder?" muttered Bob.

"In you we expect to find, latent but surely present, the old power that will give us control of a medium that can revive all the old glory of Indian magic and double-sight.

"You need not fear. We shall not injure you. You will thank us, when we have demonstrated your abilities, when, after the test, we take you back with us to India to rule the people who will venerate you."

"See here——" began Bob.

"You are speaking?" smiled the man. "I cannot hear you. I am deaf. Only listen. Trust in what I told you. Placidly obey, and all will be well. You cannot fail in the test—you, a mystic, the descendant of eight generations of mystics. "The spark immortal is born in you!"

"I wonder what the test is?" soliloquized Bob.

"You see the matting, the screen, the grave. I will place you in the Hindoo hypnotic death-trance. For eight days and nights you shall undergo suspended animation. At the end of that time we will revive you. It will prove to my brothers that you are of the true magi line—from then your wonderful powers will glow—will glow!"

"What!" arose to Bob Ferret's horrified lips, but the word only gurgled.

Like dazzling gems, the eyes of the whole group were fixed upon him.

Bob had heard of hypnotism, of the weird, strange power of some of those fanatic Indian fakirs.

He certainly felt it now—he could not speak, he could not move.

Swaying, he sank forward, one last harrowing conviction filling his mind.

He was about to be buried alive!

CHAPTER XII.

NOT YET!

Scratch—scratch—scratch!

The sounds called Bob Ferret back to life, how long after leaving it he did not know.

"Buried alive!—this is the way it feels to be dead!" ran through Bob's mind instantly. "Eight days and eight nights of it, and not being a mystic nor the son of a mystic, I'm in the fix of my life!"

There was a shuddering reality that took all flippancy out of Bob's mind and Bob's soliloquy.

Scratch—scratch—scratch!

Those sounds from the outside world, vague, distant, a vibrating series of scrapes coming with considerable regularity, abruptly caught his attention.

"Overhead," decided Bob. "I guess it's in the room where I saw the hole in the ground, and I'm in that hole. Covered over with earth? No. Swathed in that matting like a mummy, with a damp cloth over my face, a cloth full of some liquid. Ugh! It makes me sick and dizzy to smell it—some drug. There's a break!"

A break there was, sudden and enlightening. The scratching ended in a creaky snap. Something gave way, and something landed with a jar on top of Bob

or rather on top of the thick fold after fold of matting that encased him. It began to move about all over him, and then to begin to scratch—scratch—scratch again.

"The leopard!"

Bob guessed it with a thrill—guessed as well all about his environment.

Over it the wicker grating had been placed as a guard.

The leopard he had seen in the room above, hiding or lurking, had scented a victim of prey, and, beyond its master's present control, in trying to push aside the screen had broken through it, and was now pawing Bob over, trying to get at him.

The scratching efforts of the animal now partook more of a tearing, rending character.

Bob could hear its claws tear loose the thin weaves. He could imagine these cut through, separated like wrapping after wrapping of paper around a parcel.

"I've got to brace up or I'm lost," reflected Bob. "I never was so weak, dizzy-headed, knocked out in my life, but here's its crowning struggle, if I don't mistake.

Nearer dug the leopard, greater grew the pressure on Bob, but looser became the mass of coverings.

With a rip of its active paws the leopard tore along the final laps of matting with such force and velocity that Bob felt one of the animals claws catch into his clothing as well.

The covering fell away from him. Bob drew up his arms.

They were so cramped that they scarcely had any feeling in them.

As he moved, the lithe leopard sprang back.

With a tremendous effort Bob struggled to his feet, kicking free the mass of disordered matting.

He nerved himself for a clutch at the top of the hole. It required a spring. He made it, got aloft and started for the door of the place.

Instantly he went flat. The leopard, following him out of the hole, had landed on his shoulders.

As Bob went down the animal slid beyond him, one paw tearing across Bob's scalp like a buzz saw.

Bob reached out for the stool just at hand. Bob got to his feet, staggering.

Whack!

Down the stool came, squarely meeting the leopard's hard skull.

"I've stunned it," commented Bob, and put for the door.

It was broad daylight—about noon, Bob guessed, as he came outside the place.

He started ahead blindly, for his eyes were yet dazed, and he went none too steadily, for his feet were half-asleep.

There was a slight rise in front of the mill, and up it Bob ran. Gaining its edge, he saw that it looked squarely down twenty-five feet to a roadway.

"After me!"

Bob looked back, for a commotion had suddenly sounded out.

Coming through the door over the threshold he had just passed was the leopard.

Running toward him from the rear of the house were two Hindoos.

Bob started up at his full speed. He had no weapon, he saw that in a race he would be overtaken within thirty seconds.

Rounding some high bushes, he made a dart for the edge of the rise, determined to jump to the road below.

Recklessly leaving terra-firma, Bob's eyes expanded.

"Luck!" he breathed, ardently.

An immense load of hay was just passing below. In front sat the driver, nodding.

Plump into the middle of the soft yielding mass Bob landed, sank clear out of view and snuggled there.

He fancied he heard challenging shouts from the Hindoos, he imagined the driver checked the vehicle for an instant, but as it proceeded forward at its old jog, Bob made no effort to peer from his covert, content to feel safely hidden.

He rested, for he needed rest, and he must have nodded, for he aroused with a start at last to find the wagon at a standstill.

Burrowing his way out of the hay Bob saw that the vehicle was standing in the market square of a bustling little country town.

He slid to the ground and made instantly for a railroad depot near by. A

few inquiries, an investigation of a purse found in a pocket of Rolfe Spencer's borrowed clothes, a brief wait, and Bob was springing on a train for New York city.

The clocks were striking seven when Bob ran up the steps of Nick Carter's home, let himself in with a latch key, and eagerly crossed the portals of the detective's library to find his patron engaged in earnest conversation with Jack Burton and Aleck White.

"Hello!" gasped the latter.

Nick scanned his protege keenly.

Bob's strange attire and general appearance told the shrewd veteran that a story lay behind them of more than ordinary import.

"Well, Bob?" he insinuated simply.

"I've run down the motive in the Rolfe Spencer mystery," announced Bob with definiteness.

"Oh, indeed?" murmured Nick.

"Yes, I made a bold bid for information wanted, Mr. Carter. I've some large things to tell you and to tell him, and I think we had better get to the Spencer home and let the ex-railway president know how matters stand. You see, I took his grandson's place, probably saved his life by doing so, and want to explain to him——"

"You won't be able to explain to him, Bob," interrupted the detective.

"Eh! Why not?"

"Because Rolfe Spencer has mysteriously disappeared!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TRACKED.

"Mr. William Major."

"Not in, sir."

Bob Ferret asked the question—Bob the tireless, the invincible.

It was only three hours after his return to report to Nick Carter the most eventful exploit in his detective career, and yet Bob was once more on active duty.

That very morning the ex-railroad president had come tearing up to Nick's home in a carriage, frantic over the mysterious disappearance of his grandson.

Bob asked a few rapid questions, Bob learned that his abandoned suit of clothes had disappeared with Rolfe Spencer, settled on a theory, and announced to Nick

that he was going to find out what had become of the magnate's grandson.

He asked about Buff. Not a word had been received from Bob's newsboy ally, however, and this mystified Bob most of all.

Bob went straight from Nick Carter's house to that of the rainmaker.

He remembered the address given on the torn card. When he reached it, he found it to be a third-rate boarding house.

An inquiry brought out the information that Major was not at home.

Bob put her through a rapid course of questions. Had Major been home that day?

Yes, early in the morning. And went away? Before daylight. Alone? The girl hesitated, but finally answered "yes." On foot? The girl got flustered, and finally said "no."

Bob read something under the surface. He came up closer to the girl.

"Young lady," he spoke in his most winning tones, and the politic courtesy caught the girl all a-flutter, "you are hiding something from me. Now this is dead wrong. Major is in trouble, serious trouble. I don't mind telling you that. If you conceal facts you'll share his trouble, and if you let them out now, to me, while its some use, you'll have the price of a new gown as soon as I run across him."

The girl hesitated, reflected. Then she blurted out:

"He didn't go away alone, then, and he went in a carriage."

"Ah!" muttered Bob, "who was with him?"

"A boy. About your size, and say!" exclaimed the girl, with a start, "the boy had just such a birthmark on his hand as you've got."

"Did, eh?" interrogated Bob, with brightening face.

"Yes. The boy came here just as I got up this morning, and just after Major had come in. He had a card of Mr. Major's torn in two. He asked me if he could see that man. I sent him up to Major's room. Soon Major comes out, excited-like, and sends me for a cab. Soon it comes up, and he was half-leading, half-carrying the boy to it, and drove off."

"Where?" demanded Bob, sharply.

"How do I know? But maybe to his place down on Staten Island."

"What place?"

"Where he has been making his experiments in rain-making."

"Got the trail, first innings!"

Bob only needed the stimulation of a promising clue to revive all his vim and ardor.

He left the rain-maker's lodgings entirely enlightened.

"Clear as daylight," declared Bob. "It's find Major and I've cornered the last point. I see how it is—Rolfe Spencer woke up in a maze and got to investigating. He found his own clothes gone, and mine in their place. He saw the open window, the skylight, the ropes. He looked to me just plucky enough to be tired of being a lay figure surrounded with watchmen and mystery, and decided to take a hand in affairs himself. What did he do? Put on my clothes, followed the mystifying cord to the roof, the ladder to the ground, and wire to the brush. It all puzzles him, and he goes farther. All he finds in my pocket to guide him is the plan of the grounds and Major's card. He comes to the rain-maker for explanation. Major drugs him and spirits him away, and—it's a quick run before he gets him beyond reach!"

Bob had got very clear directions as to the location of the rain-maker's quarters on Staten Island.

It was long after midnight when he reached the place—a low shed, isolated, near an inlet.

It had a half basement, probably Major's work-room, and one large apartment only on its main floor—littered up with kegs, boxes, jars of chemicals, rocket sticks, and all the paraphernalia likely to accrue to a man in Major's line.

Bob crept up cautiously and peered in. No one was in view.

Then observing pen, ink and a half-written sheet on the table, and taking a risk he had no business to venture, Bob stole across the floor.

"Hello!" he ejaculated, and became instantly interested in an uncompleted scrawl.

It was addressed to the railroad magnate, Edward Spencer.

"Your grandson will be a thousand miles away when you get this," ran the first sentence.

"It will take one hundred thousand dollars in cold cash, paid within ten days, to get him back. If not paid, and any row made——" ended the second sentence.

"Ah! I see!" muttered Bob. "Major found out that he took the wrong Rolfe Spencer to the Hindoos, and with the right one dropped into his power, he is going to leave the Hindoos to their own devices and hold the magnate's grandson for ransom. I wonder how he theorizes out my part in it——"

Slam!"

Across the table, dashed flat by a powerful hand, went Bob.

Click!

Over his wrists snapped a pair of handcuffs. Around his feet went a dozen strands of wire. He was lifted, thrown upon a heap of stuff resembling a collapsed balloon, and, staring up amazed, was confronted by the rain-maker.

Major was glaring down at him, and Bob saw that the branded right hand held his glance.

"How did you get here?" demanded the rain-maker, his brow set in a ferocious scowl.

"You think you have seen me before?" remarked Bob.

"I know it. Don't attempt to bandy words with me. Time is worth gold dollars. I know from that mark, from the clothes you wear, that you are the boy whom I took from a certain place in a balloon early yesterday morning. I got word two hours since that you escaped. I say, who are you—what are you meddling in this affair for?"

"You guess it!"

"Yes, I will guess it!" cried Major, becoming fearfully enraged—"you are helping out the detective the Spencers employed."

"Maybe."

"Nick Carter? I am right. I can see it by your face. Well warned!"

The man moved away.

A great barrel stood at one side of the room. He approached it.

Picking up a tool from a bench he pried out its bung.

From a drawer he brought out a lot of fuses, such as he employed in making his cloud-exploding rockets.

He inserted one of these into the hole in the barrel and lighted its trailing end.

"Hold on," began Bob.

The man turned on him, grim, murderous-looking, determined.

"You know too much!" he ground out. "If you are one of Nick Carter's crowd, good-by to safety for me in New York ever again! I know just enough, from what the real Rolfe Spencer blurted out, to guess you're deep in this case. It's you are one hundred thousand dollars. I'll take the cash."

"Don't be too certain!"

"Bah! Know what's in that barrel? Twenty gallons of my rain-exploding chemical. In three minutes the fuse will reach it. In two I shall be afloat with my hostage worth a fortune, making a sloop, Bermuda bound. You meddled. Take the consequences."

The man hurriedly picked up some trifles from a heap in the table drawer.

A fierce splutter of the fuse caused him to hasten to the door.

He closed it, locked it.

Bob Ferret was left alone, secured hand and foot, staring helplessly at the creeping trail of fire that, according to schedule, was to ignite the explosive chemical in the barrel within sixty seconds and blow the shed and all it contained to atoms.

CHAPTER XIV.

PROMOTED.

One minute—sixty seconds—Bob's nerves were trained ones, but he turned cold all over.

He stood in the way of the rain-maker's hundred thousand dollars, and the penalty was about to be paid.

Not a sound broke the intense stillness of the place except a slight scratching noise under the floor and a trickle below—rats and dripping water, Bob estimated.

His heart throbs timed the seconds—the fuse flared over the rim of the barrel, toward the bung hole—into it.

Bob shivered.

"I say!"

Instead of the expected explosion came a cheery, familiar hail.

"I'm dreaming!" gulped Bob.

"Here——"

Tap—tap!

"See?"

Up through a break between two boards in the flooring the tips of human fingers vigorously wriggled.

"Who?" shot out Bob.

"Buff!" floated up boisterously.

"Never!"

"Always! Ugh! Whew! Up she goes!"

Slam!

A trap door lifted and went banging back.

Into full view, grinning, chuckling, radiant, stepped the newsboy king.

"It's like a play!" he said.

"How did you ever——"

"Got tired of waiting for you near the Spencer place," rattled on Buff; "went to investigating. Broad daylight. I put."

"Where for?"

"Here. That was my only point. Why? Because I had found a tag that had come off some canvas stuff one of those fellows near Spencer's had. It directed me here. Got in the cellar here. Hid. Been watching since last evening."

"But the barrel, the fuse——"

"Heard the old villain—cellar full of tools—auger, bored, emptied the chemical—no bust up. Saved! How's that for quick work and a climax?"

Off came the wire loops enclosing his feet, but to get the handcuffs loose Buff had to employ hammer and chisel.

"Now, then, after that man!" directed Bob.

"Yes, he carried a boy from here half-an-hour ago, to a boat, I guess," spoke Buff.

They ran out of the shed, Buff belligerently waving the hammer, which he had retained in his grasp.

The water was about a hundred yards distant. Following its gleam as a guide, they came upon a boat.

At its stern was a lantern, and its rays showed a form lying in the bow and a man just getting ready to push off.

"It's the rain-maker," murmured Bob.

The sound of their swift feet skithering over the sand struck Major's hearing.

He made a dive for the boat, grasped up a pistol lying in it, and turned.

"Rush right on him," ordered Bob.

"Better way!"

Crack!

Through the air a formidable projectile, aimed true as a trivet, the hammer went flying from Buff's hand.

"Champion quoit thrower of the 'Steenth, you know!" he commented.

The rain-maker, about to fire, threw up both hands and sunk a lifeless lump to the sand.

Two hours later a cab deposited a queer load at the door of Nick Carter's headquarters.

Securely tied, a groaning, half-sensible burden of humanity, Major, the rain-maker, was lifted up the steps.

A little dazed, but gradually recovering from the effects of the drug administered to him, Rolfe Spencer followed.

Nick Carter had retired, but a word brought him down-stairs like a fireman signalled into service by the alarm gong.

Jack Burton and Aleck White filled in the picture a second later, and Bob was ready for business.

The veteran detective listened closely to Bob's exciting narrative.

"You'll not do much rain-making for a few years to come, my man," remarked Nick, significantly to Major.

The latter only groaned. Buff's blow with the hammer was troubling him most just now.

"I will be back in a moment," and Nick left the room and returned shortly leading in, glum and sullen-faced, the Hindoo whom Buff and his newsboy contingent had captured in the chicken-coop.

"He has just come out from the influence of the drug he took to thwart us," explained Nick to Bob. "Now, my man, listen."

Nick made Bob tell his story again.

"You see, we have your schemes under pretty clear cynosure," spoke Nick. "We can send you and your friends to a good long term of imprisonment, if we wish."

"Let me ask you a question," interjected Bob. "Your friends referred to this boy Rolfe Spencer as the son of Mark Spencer of India."

"It is true—his son, and also the son of the princess——"

"Look here!" interrupted Rolfe Spencer with a start, "that's a mistake."

The Hindoo looked up interested now.

"You are not?" he asked.

"Certainly not. It was my uncle who was named Mark. I am the son of Robert Spencer."

"It is simple," announced Bob. "Djalma, you and your friends have been running down the wrong person."

"Yes, my uncle and his Indian wife and their son are all dead, years ago."

The Hindoo's face expressed conviction, but it fell with disappointment and chagrin.

"Is it possible?" he murmured.

"You shall be entirely convinced of it," announced Rolfe Spencer.

"Then, Bob, not only have you penetrated the mystery surrounding this strange case," spoke Nick Carter, "but you have dissipated the menace that hung over the Spencer household as well."

Rolfe Spencer reached forward impulsively and grasped Bob's hand. He began to thank him effusively—to place at his command the wealth, the influence of the Spencer family for his noble work in their behalf.

"I want nothing but Mr. Carter's commending word," said Bob.

"You have that—never more emphatically!" declared the veteran detective.

"And something for Buff," continued Bob.

"Don't bring me in—I did nothing!" stammered Buff, so modest and embarrassed that he looked positively scared.

"Did nothing?" repeated Bob Ferret, with animation. "Mr. Carter, this boy is a jewel! He's got the pluck of a hero, the patience of a true soldier, the grit of an Indian fighter, and I ask a favor for him."

"What is that?" insinuated Nick.

"Promotion."

"Promotion?"

"Yes, from being an occasional messenger for Nick Carter, to what I know his ardent heart craves most on earth—a pupil of Nick Carter's Detective School."

THE END.

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain, "Done with a Click; or, The Mystery of the Painted Arm," by the author of Nick Carter."

TRUE POLICE STORIES

The Shield Weekly

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES

Are stranger than fiction. THE SHIELD WEEKLY is a new series of Detective Stories, but it is "something different." Street & Smith's long experience in the publishing business has taught them that the average man and boy like nothing better than *good detective stories*. We have, in the past, published many of the old style, where the detective passes through a series of marvelous and hairbreadth escapes and finally secures his quarry. THE SHIELD WEEKLY will, however, be an *absolutely new departure*. Each and every number of the weekly will contain a history of a complete and intricate crime, the solution of which is worked out by the skill and ability of the detectives.

THESE ARE TRUE STORIES
absolute chapters of experience taken
from the note books of the greatest
and most noted Chiefs of Police in
the largest cities of America ❀❀❀❀


Their fund of knowledge upon this subject has been drawn upon by *special arrangement*. We propose to demonstrate to the reading public of America through the SHIELD WEEKLY that the *true histories of real crimes contain as much and more of romance than do the imaginative tales which have been constructed in the past by the writers of detective stories*. We feel that the time is ripe for the presentation of this absolutely new class of detective tales. The first numbers in this series will consist of manuscripts from records in the archives of the Boston police, as represented by **INSPECTOR WATTS**, who is well known throughout the New England States, in fact, throughout America, as *one of the shrewdest and most clever Secret Service Officials in the world*. The great inspectors of other large cities of the country will figure in due course.

~ CATALOGUE ~

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1—Sheridan Keene, Detective ; or, The Chief Inspector's Best Man | 12—Arrested at the Tomb ; or, Sheridan Keene on a Curious Case |
| 2—Silhouette or Shadow ; or, A Question of Evidence | 13—In Bad Hands ; or, Sheridan Keene's Help to Some Country Visitors |
| 3—Inspector Watts' Great Capture ; or, The Case of Alvord the Embezzler | 14—The Mysterious Signal ; or, Sheridan Keene on the Water Front. |
| 4—Cornered by Inches ; or, A Curious Robbery in High Life | 15—Behind the Asylum Bars ; or, Turned Down as a Hopeless Case |
| 5—The Man and the Hour ; or, Sheridan Keene's Clever Artifice | 16—A Paper Gold Mine ; or, Sheridan Keene After Money Order Book 2409 |
| 6—Who Was the Model ? or, Missing, a Beautiful Heiress | 17—Found Guilty ; or, Steve Manley Against Court and Jury |
| 7—Under Seal ; or, The Hand of the Guilty | 18—Called Down ; or, Steve Manley in a Desperate Strait |
| 8—A Lion Among Wolves ; or, Sheridan Keene's Identity | 19—A Skin Game ; or Steve Manley Among the Tanners |
| 9—A Double Play ; or, Two Mysteries in One Net | 20—The Head Hunter ; or, Steve Manley's Secret Mission |
| 10—A Frozen Clue ; or, The Cold Storage Mystery | |
| 11—Under The Knife ; or, The Cloak of Guilt | |

THE SHIELD WEEKLY TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES WITH REAL PLOTS

It is issued every week on Wednesday.
It can be found on sale at all Newsdealers.

5 CENTS Try one. We know you
PER COPY will like it. 

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 238 William St.
NEW YORK